

A SUMMER STORY

Libby Carson, young, attractive and with a little daughter, is believed by everyone in the Northern Californian seaside village to be a widow. Some of the local men are in love with her and she, on her side, has her secrets. But Libby Carson's problems and true story come into the open after the arrival at Drakefall Point of Hilton Sands the radio commentator and Louis Marcalis the millionaire. That summer a storm of scandal and speculation breaks around Libby.

Books by Edward Holstius

GOLD DUST
PITILESS YOUTH
WINTER'S END
HOLLYWOOD THROUGH THE BACK DOOR
ANGEL'S FLIGHT
EVERGREEN
BROTHER DEVIL
A SUMMER STORY

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A novel by

EDWARD HOLSTIUS



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To
LETITIA HEMSLEY

All the characters depicted and names used in this book are drawn entirely from the imagination of the author, and no reference to any particular person is intended.

BOOK I

I

WHEN THE SMALL FISHING FLEET RETURNED to Drakefall Point, their skippers, anxious to be home again, could see only wooded hills in the distance. As the boats drew nearer land they could distinguish Tom Allbright's white-painted general store near the waterfront and the corrugated iron roof of Al Reindeck's garage, which glistened if the sun were shining. Their first view of home, however, was of swaying trees brushed by an invisible hand, as though someone were blowing gently on to a strip of rich green velvet. Even on a calm day the distant bay trees swayed as a Pacific breeze passed inland in search of busier places.

If the fishing fleet entered the bay at dusk, lights sprang up timidly amid the hills: but by the time the small boats were at anchor, every kitchen or living-room window on the hillside twinkled like diamanté; for the houses in Drakefall Point, with few exceptions, were built among thickly-wooded hills.

Apart from the few who earned their livelihoods in this small community; the four hundred souls who lived there all the year were largely people who had retired to this quiet corner of northern California, sixty miles to the north of San Francisco across the Golden Gate, because they owned a summer house there and had grown to love it. And after the gaiety of its summer season, during which its population swelled considerably as families and their children came to enjoy its simple pleasures, the village sank back into its winter apathy and relied upon its own resources.

There were many among the elderly who resented the summer invasion because it took longer each day to do the marketing; others resented that their usual parking places had been usurped. But generally—and especially with the younger set—the arrival of the summer visitors was the highlight of the year.

Libby Carson, in her early thirties, was one of the many who looked forward to the summer season. She entered the general store one morning in February 1953, wearing blue jeans and a cowboy shirt, to buy her groceries; and having completed her purchases she waited at the counter while Tom Allbright listed them and replaced a stubby pencil behind his ear.

"Want to charge these, Libby? You can have credit again."

She opened her purse and placed a five-dollar bill on the counter. "No, I'll pay cash," she said with a smile. "Find I spend less."

"As you like," Tom Allbright said, ringing up the cash register. "Hear Emily Prout's rented her place again for the summer?"

"That's what I heard."

"Never failed to rent the place—yet."

The young woman accepted her change. "Like to rent my place at the price *she* gets, Tom."

The elderly storekeeper placed her purchases into a large paper-bag. "You're darn right," he said.

She picked up her groceries, smiled to Tom Allbright, smiled to Mrs. Rosali who was just entering the store, and crossed the street to her ancient Chevrolet and put the package on the back seat.

After pausing to chat idly with other villagers in the main street, Libby entered the Post Office. The laconic postmaster, who spent his day peering lugubriously at

each arrival from behind a small aperture in the wall, took a cigarette from his dry lips and placed it tidily on the shelf behind him, first knocking off the ash.

"Hi," was the greeting of Mark J. Featherbow, United States Postmaster at Drakefall Point, Marin County.

"Hi."

"What do you know?"

"Nothing much," Libby replied as she reached into the pocket of her blue jeans for some letters that she wished to mail.

"Heard Emily Prout's rented her place again for the summer?"

"Yes," she said, opening her purse again, "I heard that one. Any mail for me?"

"A letter from Chicago. Dunno who it's from. Don't remember anything else." He left the small opening in the wall and returned with a letter, tossing it across to her.

Mark, having completed his official business, picked up his cigarette. "Some say the folks who've rented Emily Prout's house have plenty of dough."

"More important," she answered with a smile, "are they young?"

Everyone remarked upon Libby Carson's quick and friendly smile. She was not beautiful, in the accepted sense. Women, picking her to pieces, agreed, feature by feature, that she was almost plain: but they envied the general effect. They envied, too, her poise and good sense of clothes—for she could look *soigné* even in blue jeans. Men, first arrested by her slim and graceful figure, soon found that she had intelligence and wit. Some of the younger men in Drakefall Point felt shy with her. at first: for except in the summer season they

met few women of sophistication. But Libby soon broke down all shyness with her gaiety and friendliness, and had become the most sought-after young woman in the community.

Libby Carson had arrived, unknown, in the village with her child and had rented a small house on the hill. No one had seen her husband; nor could the inquisitive find out very much about him. The elderly Miss Kingston, the acknowledged chatelaine of the village with a large house on the exclusive Bluff area, had not yet called upon her, nor invited her to her house. Until that moment arrived Libby was not included in the 'Bluff set' and had to look for her social life among the lesser important of the village. Unlike many of the young married women whose social ambition it was to achieve the hall-mark of being invited to Miss Kingston's, Libby Carson did not appear to care. Her telephone, in any case, was always ringing with invitations to drop by at some neighbour's house; and people were constantly dropping by at hers. She entered, too, into the general community life—the poker games, the square dancing in the school-house on Thursday nights, and she attended some of the whist drives—always appearing to be having fun. People often said that she must find life dull in Drakefall Point, having seen service overseas during the war and having lived always in the East. But everyone agreed that Libby brought to the village, and maintained, an all-the-year-round sophistication. Her entrance at any village function—always suitably and sometimes daringly attired—was a welcome moment in the winter village life. "Wait till Libby arrives," was a frequent aside from a husband to a wife when they had organised a small party and it was falling a little flat.

The postmaster, who was constantly thinking of her

many charms, inhaled his cigarette and leaned forward so that his head and shoulders were now half protruding through the aperture. "Yes," he said, "this place needs more young people, but what's to bring them? No big industry up here. Nothing to entice them. Best climate in California, to my way of thinking." He examined the glowing tip of his cigarette. "But we're in the sticks up here. Wonder you stand it. A lot of people wonder why you do. Why do you?"

She laughed, showing even teeth. "I get credit up here, Mark. At least, I did. Anyhow, I like it."

"You're too good for this place."

Libby had known since the first dance that she attended after her arrival in the village that Mark Featherbow was in love with her. She had since learned that many of the locals desired her, too. She had never had any illusions about her power to excite the primitive in man. Mark danced clumsily and was a man of few words: but she danced with him each time he asked her because, as a newcomer especially, she did not want to hurt anyone's feelings. A dangerous and rather clumsy moment some hours later when Mark, leaving the others behind in his car, saw her in the darkness to her door, was cut short by surprised, but gracious, indignation, achieved so gently that Mark was not hurt, and still remained hopeful. There were many such hopeful males residing in Drakefall Point. Al Reindeck, the proprietor of the local garage who kept Libby's ancient jalopy chugging on the roads against all odds, also thought far more about her than he should, for he was a married man. But Libby unconsciously made every man feel that she owed more to him than to any man in her life—however lowly the service. It was never premeditated.

"Yes," the postmaster repeated, looking thoughtfully again at the glowing tip of his cigarette, "I wonder you stay in this place."

She did not say that she could not afford to move to any other place: nor did she remind him that the local store recently had to suggest that she could no longer have credit—which lamentable fact the postmaster, as the reception centre for all gossip, would be the first to hear. "I'd hate to leave here," she replied, smiling at Mark Featherbow in the way that he especially liked. And Mark, reading more into those words than she had implied, took the cigarette from his lips and returned the smile.

She left the Post Office and crossed the street. Dr. Braithwaite's car was drawn up behind her old jalopy.

"Hi, Libby," the young doctor called cheerfully through the car window. "What's new?"

"Nothing much, Earl," she said, approaching the car.

"Coming to the whist drive, Tuesday?"

"Maybe."

"Melissa's chest better?"

"Much better."

"Did you rub the chest, like I said?"

"Made a real production out of it."

The doctor laughed, too. "You could make a production out of anything. If you're doing nothing better this evening, drop by for a drink."

"Can't, I'm afraid, Earl—though I'd like to."

Libby had always liked Earl. Being a doctor he had a college education and with him she could discuss subjects outside the range of their normal village life. Earl was not the type, in any case, to be affected by a tightly-fitting sweater as Mark and the others were,

which became such a bore. She liked his attractive wife, Gloria, too.

"Too bad. Another time, then."

Libby withdrew her hands from the car window. "Fancy new car you've got, Earl."

Earl grinned. "Had to buy a new one to please my patients. They said I was getting scedy."

"Well, it's fancy all right."

She waved as he drove away. She had nothing to do that evening, but she disliked continually accepting drinks that she could not return; and money had been too tight recently for her to do any entertaining. Earl, during the course of his daily visits, learned most things that were happening in the village and quite likely knew that she was free that evening—which was why he had invited her. Earl always did kind things like that. She was grateful to him, too, for being the only person she had met that morning who had not talked about Emily Prout renting her rambling old house for July, August and September. But then, Earl never mentioned local affairs or indulged in any gossip. In his profession he had to treat Episcopalians, Catholics, Presbyterians, Baptists, and such varied nationalities as Italians, Portuguese and Indians—in the village and on the near-by ranches. He also took care of any coloured folk. He treated, too, the warring factions in the village, where, especially at election times, he turned away political thrusts with a laughing turn of phrase. A successful general practitioner in a small community cannot afford to take sides in large issues. Earl Braithwaite therefore retained the warm affection of the whole community—and their respect.

Libby stood until the doctor's car had disappeared up the hill that led finally to her own house. She knew where

he would be going. She had heard Nancy Battersbury, on 'the same party line as her own, speaking to the doctor that morning. They were in the middle of a conversation when she lifted the telephone and before she could replace the receiver she heard Earl saying that she would have to go to hospital. Everyone had known for some time that Nancy had been having abdominal pains and some feared that it might be a growth. She would, of course, hear from Nancy about her having to go to hospital, but she despised people who listened in on other people's calls, although she was aware that Nancy Battersbury listened in on her calls all the time.

She got back into her car and pressed the self-starter, which her admirer, Al Reindeck, had just repaired, and the engine spluttered into life. Her house, high on the hill, was like most other houses in the village. Trees had been cut down to make its site, and redwood had been used to build it, and a rough road in the clearing led towards it. It was an old house, built at the turn of the century, like many others; but it had long had dry-rot, with which many of the houses were affected owing to the damp winter mists that blew in from the Pacific. But Libby, with a flair for making any house attractive, had used chintzes to good effect; and with floor and table lamps had managed to cast attractive shadows in the evening. When a log fire burned in the open grate at nights and the radio or phonograph was playing and guests sat around chatting, it was generally accepted that Libby Carson had the most friendly house in Drakefall Point. It was only in the morning, when the sun streamed ruthlessly through the windows, that one saw the patch of damp caused by a gutter clogging in the winter, the curtains that were stained and soiled in the same storm, and the bright new strip of redwood in

the ceiling where it had been repaired after a tree fell, leaving a gaping hole. But it still remained a house of mellow taste, interiorly, achieved with a minimum of cost.

Still feeling unhappy about hearing Nancy's news in the way that she had, Libby motored back to the Post Office to see if Nancy had any mail. She also stopped at the school-house and collected Melissa, who was playing in the school-yard with Nancy's little daughter, Jill, and bought them both ice-cream on the way home.

Miss Ada Kingston, the largest landowner in the locality, with family ties more deep-rooted in the soil than any inhabitant of Drakefall Point, was the only person in the village whose views about Libby Carson were correct. She had no husband.

While serving in the war as a junior officer in a woman's branch of the Armed Forces, Libby had fallen deeply in love with Jerd, a Colonel whose unit was stationed in the same area. Before the war Libby had worked as a secretary in Livingston, Illinois, living with her family in a modest suburban home. Jerd, in private life, was a rich New York socialite. Their romance had for her, therefore, the added magic that riches can bring. He was handsome, in addition, with prematurely greying hair. Her family had always called her Betty, for her name was Elizabeth: but because Jerd called her Libby, she had used the name ever since.

Jerd was in the process of a divorce when they met; and he proposed marriage, as many men have done before, meaning it at the time. Their love then grew into intimacy. She had never, until then, given herself to a man; but she gave herself to Jerd with the confidence of a bride, and with the same shy excitement.

There was an added thrill in loving Jerd, for he epitomised a way of life that she had known only by reading of it enviously in the society columns. She was not envious of that way of life merely for its material advantages: but in that exclusive world of breeding there were no rough or jarring corners. She would have loved Jerd if he hadn't had a penny in the world.

Jerd, on his side, enjoyed her gay enthusiasms and her zest for living. After a surfeit of highly sophisticated affairs, he enjoyed her wide-eyed gratitude for the gifts that he showered upon her. Libby, to him, was an entirely new experience. After the over-civilised women in the international set in which he normally lived—with its insincerities and exaggerated jargon—Libby's natural charm and honesty were a welcome relief. He found her, mentally and physically, a sheer delight. That she had known no lover until their meeting flattered and intrigued him.

When she found that she was pregnant, Jerd, looking serious, suggested an abortion—a suggestion that stunned. Wasn't a child the natural outcome of their union? True, the child would now be born before the accepted time, but that was their responsibility. To employ a surgeon's scalpel, she said, to destroy the baby forming in her womb was just unthinkable. Jerd shrugged, and finally agreed. Libby always spoke her mind, even if it were to her disadvantage.

She had to leave the Service when her condition became known to the authorities—an experience made easier by the knowledge that the baby was Jerd's and that in a short space of time she would be his wife. Jerd, who was posted to Rome after the fall of Italy, suggested that she rent a small apartment in Washington until his

return, by which time his divorce would be through. He arranged every detail of her confinement before leaving and arranged for flowers to be sent to her daily, and for expensive gifts to arrive at unexpected moments. He wrote to her frequently; at first.

When his letters grew less frequent, she did not worry; for in every letter he had told her that his duties daily grew more onerous. Then one morning she read in the *Washington Post* that he had married an Italian countess. It appeared to have been a whirlwind courtship. Jerd, in a stilted letter, wrote to tell her—after the event. He would settle money on the child, he said, as though that would forgive him everything.

Libby gave birth to Melissa that day, prematurely.

It takes time to adjust to news like that. Her reactions completed a full cycle as she lay in her hospital bed, dazed. From feelings of shock, of grief, of loneliness, of humiliation, and finally of rage and near-hysterics, she calmed to a mood of acceptance. She would not, as someone had suggested, give the baby for adoption. She loved the gurgling creature already. She loved her more each time that she was allowed by the nurse to hold her. On one point she was decided: she would accept nothing from Jerd. She had always been stubbornly proud.

Yet as the days dragged by and she held Melissa's warm and wriggling little body close to her, she considered the bleak future more rationally. She and Jerd each had their responsibilities. Her own life, from now onwards, would be dramatically changed as she faced life with a child, with her living to earn at the same time: and her responsibility would continue until Melissa grew into womanhood and married. Was it right that Jerd, a rich man, should be freed of his responsibilities?

Was it right to rob Melissa of financial security out of her own anger, pride and hurt? Jerd, who in private life was a member of the New York Stock Exchange, would merely transfer some stock into a trust fund, and there his responsibility would end. There was another aspect to be considered: should anything happen to her, what would become of Melissa? Jerd's proposal of a trust fund began slowly to make sober sense. When she duly received a letter from Jerd's attorneys—for in this matter he had remembered his promise—she agreed to the settlement.

After leaving the hospital she returned with Melissa to Livingston, Illinois. Her parents were now dead and there were therefore no family recriminations. She did not care what the neighbours thought or said. Melissa, who had been sick and ailing since her premature birth, became gravely ill shortly after their arrival. For some weeks it was thought that she would die. When the baby was sufficiently recovered to leave the hospital, Libby found herself at work as a secretary, for the illness had made heavy inroads into her savings, and she left Melissa during the day in the care of a married sister.

Libby, in relation to any other member of her family, seemed to have been cast from a different mould. Her family, when she was a child, teasingly called her 'The Duchess' because of her superior ways. Those ways grew more marked as she grew older, so that she became a misfit in the small social circle that her parents could afford, finding the friends commonplace and their conversation dull. She did not adopt this attitude from snobbery, for she never minded who or what people were so long as they had sensitive minds and could talk on subjects other than the suburban gossip upon which her family and their circle appeared to thrive. And so

she grew apart from the small world in which her youth had been spent; and travel in the war, and her meeting with Jerd, had widened the gulf still further. To return there, instead of to the penthouse in New York that Jerd had planned as their future home, was a depressing journey. Besides, she could never tell her sisters about Jerd, for they would never understand. So she told her sisters that Melissa's father was dead, leaving it to be assumed that he had been killed in action.

She moved, two years later, to a better-paid job in Chicago as secretary to a banker. She was happier there and made many friends. She also received the usual romantic offers. But Jerd had spoiled her for other men, a difficulty that faces any woman whose first real love affair is with a man of outstanding attraction. Even so, it was flattering to find herself always in demand. It helped her morale, too, to be living again in a really big city. The banker for whom she worked was kindly and considerate. He paid her well and she was able to save. She would have remained in Chicago, but the climate of that windy city with its intense heat and cold was not good for Melissa's health; and a doctor suggested the more equable climate of California.

This, for her, would be a journey into the unknown. As she considered the suggestion, she remembered that Jerd was born in San Francisco and had spent his earliest years on the Pacific coast, where some of his relations still lived. Sentimentally, she would like Melissa's early years to be spent there, too. But it was Melissa's health that finally led her to resign her job and make their train reservations.

They arrived together in California when Melissa was six. It had been Libby's intention to find work again, but she took stock of her financial position. She had the

small income from the settlement that Jerd had made, and she had her savings. If they lived quietly in the country, and she did not work, she could give her whole time to Melissa during these important years, although she would have to watch the spending of every dime. Life, for her, might be dull, but that was unimportant. Someone in the small boarding-house in San Francisco at which they were temporarily staying suggested Drakefall Point—which is how Libby came to rent a house there.

She wondered, on arrival, if she should let it be known that she was a war widow. But if she did that, she would be expected to collect her pension at the Post Office where Mark Featherbow was the postmaster. She therefore let it be known that she was separated from her husband and that she had independent means. As far as she knew, people accepted that fact, for she still wore the gold wedding ring that Jerd had bought for her to wear the first time they registered together as man and wife in a Washington hotel. So she merely added *Mrs.* to her maiden name. To the few who tried to inquire too intimately into her private life she replied, with truth, that she was still in love with Melissa's father, but it was one of those things in life that hadn't worked out.

She had now lived in the village for two years. When she was allowed to be alone she read good books or played her favourite symphonies on her record player. She thought often of the life that might have been hers, but she spoke to nobody about it. The purpose of coming to Drakefall Point was proving successful, for Melissa was happy and her health had improved, and for that she was grateful. But she was desperately lonely sometimes for a companionship like Jerd's, for the male population was largely elderly and the young ones were

hardly stimulating. From certain of the men of all ages in the village she had, at some time or another, received advances, some timidly, some furtively, some boldly made. Having to be continually warding off predatory males had long since become an art, but it grew wearying. She was flattered that most men found her body exciting, but she sometimes wished that she had not been so generously endowed with femininity, so that she could meet men on equal terms, for she preferred their minds. There were only two really attractive men living permanently in the village—Jack Taylor and Earl Braithwaite. Both were married men, and for a reason of her own she had stopped seeing Jack Taylor alone. To Dr. Braithwaite she had recently said in answer to a direct question—"Of course I find it dull here, Earl. You must, too. But we both have jobs to do, so I guess we'll go on doing them. But I sometimes wish something would *happen*."

A great deal was to happen in the village during the summer: but until that time the inhabitants continued to live their unhurried lives.

II

DRAKEFALL POINT IS A COMMUNITY WHERE, in the normal way, people mind their own business. It is a kindly community, although it has its black sheep, like any other place. Its normal prosperity—apart from the added revenue that the summer season brings—is due largely to the ranchers on the outlying farms and to the fishermen. It has no industry of its own, as such. The owners of the small fishing boats anchored in the bay

buy their supplies from Tom Allbright's general store before setting out to sea; and the ranchers, the cattlemen and farm hands—all heavy eaters—also buy their food and supplies from Tom Allbright's store. Al Reindeck, at the garage, sells them oil and gasoline for their tractors, as he sells oil to the fishermen; and as a good mechanic he helps to maintain their engines and equipment. There is an obliging builder and contractor, Ben Truman (invariably called Harry), who builds any new houses that are needed, and maintains the old ones in a state of repair. There is a veterinarian to take care of the cattle and horses, apart from the many domestic pets: and there is Dr. Braithwaite to take care of human life. There is a parson, the Rev. Davidson, to take care of people's souls; and there is a priest at High Valley to minister to the Catholics, who are numerous among the ranchers, being largely of Irish, Italian or Portuguese descent.

Drakefall Point first became popular as a quiet summer resort at the turn of the century. People, especially from the Bay Area, anxious to avoid spending their vacations amid hot-dog stands, noise and blatant advertising signs, found it to be restful and convenient: and people wishing to avoid the sticky heat of Sacramento, Stockton, or Fresno found the climate ideal with its gentle breezes and its shady green trees and cool blue ocean. Its community life had grown, and sprung, from a sense of good-neighbourliness, for only people who enjoy the quiet life would choose it for a vacation. Many owners of the summer homes first came there as children to stay with their grandparents: and in some cases the grandsons of yesterday are now teaching their own grandchildren in the same waters to swim and sail and fish.

Little change has taken place here in the habits of the

people. Because whist was in vogue when the community was founded, whist drives are still held monthly in the school-house during the winter and are much enjoyed. Poker remains the game for Saturday night parties in private homes; and bridge is played in certain of the houses. Canasta, too, has recently been introduced, but that is played usually by the summer visitors. But for the community's winter social life the monthly whist drives in the school-house, when the largest class-room is cleared of desks, remain the gatherings to which the elderly look forward.

The school-house is again cleared of its desks on Thursday nights for the folk-dancing, enjoyed especially by the younger set. There is little else that happens in the winter. There is a small snack-bar, presided over by 'Ma' Wedekind, a long-time resident, where in the summer a flourishing trade is done with coffee, sandwiches, doughnuts, milk shakes and every form of ice-cream; and for the convenience of the permanent residents she now remains open all the year round. Her small, white-painted redwood house still remains the only form of eating-house the village has, although there is now a saloon bar across the street. In one section new houses are being built; but the community remain faithful to the simple redwood, as though it would be sacrilege to introduce the modern-type homes which today sprout like mushrooms in every small American town or suburb. Theirs was, and is, a 'family' community, and the Improvement Association watches like a hawk to ensure that it so remain.

That the village, in spite of the many commercial onslaughts made upon it by realtors, should have maintained its integrity was largely due to the unflagging services of an irascible old Judge. His Honour Homer Q.

Prout, a brother of Emily Prout whose house was already rented for the summer, was also one of the earliest settlers. The fines he levied in his local court were, with few exceptions, the maximum that he could give. A martinet of the old school, he spoke explosively and to the point; and his beetling black eyebrows lent added fear to any miscreant who was brought before him. Now a white-haired man of seventy, and a staunch Republican, Judge Prout listened to his radio each day to hear what Fulton Lewis, Jr., had to say about the devilry of the Democratic Party: and had lately taken to listening to an up-and-coming news commentator named Hilton Sands—writing him a letter of congratulation on one occasion with encouragement to put still more venom into his attacks upon the Democratic Party. But the fervour of his unflinching political beliefs was shared by his determination to keep his village from being invaded by a lot of 'goddam morons'. If he could have had his way, there would be signs erected along the winding road leading down to the village which would have read: *Unless you own property or have legitimate business to do here—keep out!* He had seen too many of America's beauty spots ruined by speculators and promoters. And the lovers of Drakefall Point agreed with him and applauded each move that he made to keep them out, recently electing him President of the Improvement Association for the eighth time. Not that it mattered whether he sat in the president's chair or not: he dominated all the meetings.

Emily Prout, whose mind was as rigidly Victorian as her taste in dress, never spoke of her brother as Homer: she referred to him always in the third person as 'The Judge'. Her house, the second largest in the community,



was in demand each summer by parents with large families because it had so many rooms, each filled with hideous bric-à-brac and unimportant trivia because Emily had an obsession about throwing anything away. A wizened spinster with protruding teeth, she looked older than her brother, largely because, as she explained to everyone, she enjoyed bad health. But Dr. Braithwaite always said that if she'd only stop buying every patent medicine that she saw advertised in the newspapers she would be sound as a bell.

Emily Prout, who, it is true, often became dyspeptic owing to her excessive use of patent cures, was one of the few who disapproved of Libby. The village could, in fact, be divided into those who approved of her wholeheartedly, and the few who did not. There was no middle course, as there seldom is in any small community over a young woman of personality. Emily's first view of her, shortly after her arrival in the village, had been in Tom Allbright's store: and she turned to Ada Kingston, with whom she had driven down to do her marketing, and said in a very loud voice, "Is that young woman wearing her *swimming* costume?"

In the summer most of the young women wore shorts. But Libby, who studied the fashion magazines carefully, and made most of her own clothes, always managed to look a little more daring than her contemporaries, if only because she had a better clothes-sense and copied most of her designs from the French fashion magazines—and copied them well.

Ada Kingston, after a long and searching glance in the direction of the meat counter, boomed her reply. "Well, she's got good legs," and Emily, whose own legs were bowed and skinny, and covered always in a voluminous skirt, had reluctantly to agree.

They saw Libby again as she left the store that morning. She was across the street talking to Al Reindeck as he serviced her car. "Well, I call it disgraceful," was Emily's further comment, "laughing and talking to Mr. Reindeck—dressed like that!"

The top of Libby's attire that morning was a form of brassière of material that matched the shorts. Her small lithe frame was already growing its sun-tan, which by the end of summer would turn to golden brown. There are many skins that tan to deep mahogany: there are few skins that look as though they had first been given an undercoat of gold. Libby's skin was like that.

"Why, she's almost showing her navel!" Emily had exclaimed in horror that morning as she drove away in Ada Kingston's old-fashioned Cadillac, turning round to make sure that it wasn't showing.

The large and good-natured Ada chuckled. "Navels, my dear," she said in her deep mannish voice, "are *one* part of the human body common to man and woman. As we've all got them, we all know what they're like. Stop picking on the girl."

To anyone but Ada Kingston, Emily Prout would have had more to say; but Ada was the social pinnacle, owning more land than anyone, enjoying the largest income and, what was even more important, she was the oldest resident. As each new arrival came to Drake-fall Point, those with houses on the exclusive Bluff area waited to see what Ada Kingston would do about them. If she invited them up to her house for a cup of tea or a glass of sherry, the other residents of the Bluff would do the same. If she ignored their arrival entirely, the new residents would have to find their social life, as Libby Carson had had to do, confined to the village folk below.

Should Ada, however, invite a new arrival to her house and serve mint-juleps—of which she was especially fond—that was the signal that all was well. The new arrivals then found themselves invited to Judge Prout's house, where they were served the best Bourbon whisky while forced to listen to the historical background of the place, what the village would stand for and what it wouldn't—as though the Judge were delivering an ultimatum. But once it became known that both Ada Kingston and the Judge had accepted a new arrival, the other residents with houses on the Bluff enveloped them graciously into their homes. Out of deference to Miss Kingston, none of the other houses served mint-juleps.

There was a curious snobbery about this village, although that would be hotly denied. Dr. Earl Braithwaite could drop by uninvited at any of the houses on the Bluff and be welcome. But Dr. Fletcher, the vet, because his patients were four-legged, had always to be invited. In the same way, should a new arrival be accepted on the Bluff, the people in the village below were a little tentative before inviting them over for a poker game. The village was, in fact, divided into two by an invisible line—or, rather, a circle. Inside, on the Bluff, lived the Judge, Ada Kingston, Emily Prout and other of the élite. From the inhabitants of this select sector of the village more was expected. Those delegated each year to collect for America's two favourite charities—the Red Cross and the Community Chest—always expected to receive larger donations from its residents. Their names, and the size of their donations, would, in any case, be recorded: but that was not the reason for the larger cheque. The people on the Bluff felt, in these matters, a pride and a responsibility. Libby Carson lived on the dividing line.

III

THE ARRIVAL OF LOUIS MARCALIS had recently set the village a problem. Judge Prout, who personally investigated the credentials of any aspirant to a house or a plot of land on the Bluff area, had to agree that, financially, Marcalis was eligible. He was president of a large shipping corporation and had made a very considerable fortune: and he had arrived in the village with an open cheque-book, anxious to play his financial part in the community life. But the Judge, while always anxious to receive handsome subscriptions for the projects that the Improvement Association had in mind for the village, regarded any man whose roots were not wholly American as a foreigner, a man to be avoided—or a dago. He regarded Louis Marcalis as a dago because he was a Greek.

The Judge's first meeting with Marcalis was not a happy one, in any case. He had been invited to Ada Kingston's one evening for mint-juleps, to find that Marcalis and his wife were the reason for the occasion, for they were considering the purchase of a house.

Marcalis's middle-aged wife, wearing heavy make-up and an expensive mink coat, which she insisted upon wearing in the house, appeared at first sight to the Judge to be intoxicated—which view was strengthened before their visit ended. She could not, she said, slurring her words as she sat on Ada Kingston's Regency sofa in the drawing-room on arrival, understand why Louis wanted to buy the old Horridge property on the other side of Ada's boundary line. Sucking noisily through the straws of her mint-julep, she proceeded to explain that they lived in New York in one of the finest apartments on

Park Avenue; and when travelling they stayed only in the best hotels. She could not see why Louis should want to buy a house in a dump like this—which remark caused highly explosive splutters from the Judge, and raised eyebrows on the faces of the other two women.

Marcalis broke the pained silence that followed. Their daughter, he quietly explained, had been at school in the East and there had met the daughter of one of California's Senators, with whom she had become a close friend, and their daughter had insisted upon proceeding with her to the University of California. "For our daughter," he said, with a diffident shrug and raising a well-manicured hand, "my wife and I would do anything. As she wishes to go to Cal., that has been arranged. But," he said, turning to Ada Kingston, "as a parent you will understand our anxiety to have a house near to her so that she can come and visit us and bring home her friends. We shall, therefore, during the time she is at the University, spend much time on the coast."

The Judge cleared his throat. "Miss Kingston, sir," he thundered, "is not married! And as the University is over at Berkeley, why don't you buy a house over *there*?"

"Because," Marcalis quietly replied, first pausing to gesture an apology to Miss Kingston, "there is no ocean there for our daughter to swim in." Turning to Emily Prout, who was sipping coffee, being a non-drinker, he said, "Our daughter is a fine swimmer. She also likes to sail boats. They tell me this is the best place for her to come. There is, furthermore," he added, addressing his next remark to the room at large, "something about this place that I find very—wholesome."

"I never found anything wholesome yet that had any

kick in it," Gladys Marcalis grunted from the couch.

Marcalis, the only standing figure in the drawing-room, placed his own unfinished glass on the mantelpiece behind him.

"Fun, Gladys," he said, "is comparative. Our daughter will find this place—fun. That is all I personally care about."

The Judge, in spite of his intuitive dislike of over-dressed men with sallow skins and small hands—especially with wives who couldn't handle their liquor—had to acknowledge that this man had strength. He spoke quietly and decisively, although with a trace of foreign accent.

"I agree with you, sir," he said from the rocking-chair, "that this place is wholesome—and that's the way we intend to keep it!"

"That," Marcalis replied, "is why I have decided to buy a house here while my daughter is at the University."

There was a momentary silence in the drawing-room. No one, until that moment, had been aware that any decision about the Horridge house had been made: Mr. and Mrs. Marcalis, as far as they knew, had merely driven out from the Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco, where they were staying, vaguely to "look at houses" in Marin County.

"Over my dead body," Gladys Marcalis muttered, still sipping through the straws. "What do you expect *me* to do here while you're flying all over the world on your goddam business?"

Louis Marcalis paused only a moment. "You will take care of our daughter," he replied.

After Mr. and Mrs. Marcalis had departed in their chauffeur-driven Cadillac for San Francisco, the com-

ments of the Judge were pithy and to the point. Ada Kingston calmed him by asking him to stop pacing about and to draw up a chair near to hers, inviting Emily to do the same, for she had something of a very private nature to disclose. It was true, she said, when she had her guests' attention, that neither Mr. nor Mrs. Marcalis were what she termed "the Drakefall Point type". At the same time, the situation was a little delicate, for Mr. Marcalis had come to her with a letter of introduction from the Governor.

This news surprised the Judge very much, for he was a staunch admirer of the Governor of his State, regarding him, in addition, as a great Republican. Having made this first disclosure, which had a temporary and salutary effect upon the Judge's temper, Ada took her guests deeper into her confidence. The Governor, she said, being an old friend and knowing her anxiety to have people among them who would make good neighbours, had also written a personal letter giving her some of the background of Marcalis and his wife—not that it was necessary to explain Marcalis himself, for he was too well-known in the worlds of shipping and finance.

It was about his wife that the Governor had written in the strictest confidence. She was unhappily, he said, an alcoholic—which was the tragedy in the husband's life. She had moments of sobriety, but they were growing fewer. The Governor did not himself think that she could live for very long. But Louis Marcalis, though a strange fellow in many ways, was a large contributor to the Republican Party funds and his financial support at the last election had been unusually generous. The Governor's view was that Marcalis—apart from wishing to buy property at Drakefall Point for his daughter—hoped that his wife would spend

much time up there, which should prove beneficial to her health. In view of the information that the Governor had confided as a friend, Ada Kingston said, she felt that a more charitable view should be taken of Mrs. Marcalis's behaviour that afternoon.

The Judge was not easily mollified. But, as Ada Kingston graciously pointed out, no one could stop Louis Marcalis buying the old Horridge property if he had set his mind on it. While it was possible to keep out smaller undesirables who often haggled over price, Louis Marcalis, if his mind were made up, would pay any price. "And, after all, Homer," she said, pushing the whisky bottle tactfully across the table in his direction, for the mint-juleps were finished, "we've got to think of Alice Horridge, too. She needs the money."

"We might give her the tip," Emily suggested brightly through her protruding teeth, "to say no—and then start putting the price up."

"We could even do that," Ada Kingston agreed, with a motherly smile.

"One thing in his favour," the Judge said, reaching for the bottle, "he's a good Republican. I'll say that for him."

"And I think," Ada Kingston said, "he'll prove a good neighbour. A man who takes care of his daughter, as he appears to do, must have good qualities. I also liked the way he used the word 'wholesome'. After all, Homer," she added, turning to the Judge again, "we've had a few alcoholics here in our time . . . and they weren't all male, either."

The Judge, remembering how his late lamented cousin, Violet, had once to be taken away from the family home in a strait jacket, said no more. But the reason that he finally agreed to offer no further opposi-

tion was that Marcalis had been personally introduced by the Governor and was, from the Governor's testimony, a Republican prepared to give more than lip service to the Party. "But that drunken wife of his," he muttered as he left, "had better hurry up and die."

A man of integrity, the Judge had given his word: but he used his official position, even so, to have the private life and past of Marcalis investigated, hoping that some criminal record might come to light which he could divulge, in the strictest confidence, to the widow of his old friend John Horridge—and that he could still prevent a sale. For he was convinced that the Greek would never settle into the community, and that he might even become an unsettling influence. But the confidential report that he duly received disappointed him: Louis Marcalis had an unblemished character. From his vast shipping interests—although the fleets that he controlled did not fly the American or even the Greek flags—he had amassed a vast fortune and to few charitable appeals did he now turn a deaf ear. A list of his recent contributions was included in the report, the sizes of which caused the Judge to clean his glasses and look again.

There was, he finally had to agree, nothing more that he could do, except to write a letter to Alice Horridge in Sausalito, stressing that she must on no account complete the deal on the present terms. Her property was far more valuable than she appeared to be aware, and she must therefore double, or even treble, her asking price. That, he thought, as he sealed the letter down, will either keep Marcalis out or provide a very welcome bonus for his old friend's widow.

But Marcalis bought the property for a slightly higher

figure only than had first been asked because, as Alice said, she hadn't the face to ask any more. If she had, the deal might have fallen through. So title deeds were drawn up and four good acres on the Bluff passed into the ownership of the Greek shipping magnate.

The next thing to upset the Judge was to hear that a firm of architects in San Francisco, employed by Marcalis to survey the old Horridge property, had reported that the only thing to be done with the house was to tear it down. The final straw was when Gladys Marcalis (sober this time, he had to agree) drove out to show him the plans for the ultra-modern house that they intended to build in its place.

The Judge studied the designs in horror. "There is an unwritten law here, madam," he finally roared, "that any new building must conform to the general architecture! The plans you're showing me look like a golfish bowl!"

"They're the plans Louis okayed before he flew East," Gladys replied, with airy finality. She took the plans from the Judge's gnarled and quivering hands, rolled them up and slipped a rubber band around them, then tapped him with them. "Did Louis talk to you before he left? He took a fancy to you, Judge. Did you know that?"

"I am not the kind of person, madam," he thundered, "to whom people take fancies!"

"Oh—but he did. Louis, you know, sums people up quick. He never likes yes-men. Besides, as he said, you've got local influence. He likes people with influence. They're the only people he has any time for. *Didn't* he talk to you?"

"No, madam, he did not!"

Gladys patted him again with the plans. "Well," she

said, "I expect he'll have a word with you the next time he sees you."

The Judge called an emergency meeting of the Improvement Association that evening in the school-house, demanding the presence of every member. With the plans, which he had insisted that Gladys leave with him, he stormed into the meeting. Such an outrage as this, he told his listeners, still fuming as he tossed the plans across the table, must on no account be permitted, and he demanded a unanimous and immediate vote to this effect.

But he met with unexpected opposition. Luke Fields, also a resident of the Bluff but always a thorn in the Judge's side, took a different view—as he often did—and for the first time Luke found some supporters. Luke, who had retired from business life in Oakland with far more money than he wished anyone to know, watched his pocket with a pawky eye, checking his wife's monthly account at Tom Allbright's store and arguing heatedly over a cent in the price of coffee. Luke Fields and the Judge had never gotten along. The Judge, whose income was far smaller than he would like anyone to know, would dig his horny hand deep into his pocket for anyone in the community who was in trouble: for, in spite of his bark, Homer Q. Prout had warm blood in his veins, although it could so easily, and in an instant, rise to boiling point. Luke never gave a dime away unless he had to—and then he quibbled.

Luke's attitude at the hastily called meeting of the Improvement Association was: "Here's a guy with plenty of dough. If what I understand is true, he's worth a few million. Now, if a guy like that builds a house here he's going to be a big spender. It's my guess,

if he builds here, he'll be a big contributor to local charities and take some of the load off *our* shoulders. Most of us living up here are retired on small incomes and it ain't easy, some months, to meet our grocery bills." There were derisive sniggers across the table from certain of the members who knew that Luke could buy up all of them and not even feel it, but to be as tight-fisted as Luke you have to be thick-skinned. Luke proceeded, unmoved at the interruption, to point out that the purpose of this meeting was to consider the plans of the Marcalis home. If the committee turned them down as being a blot on their landscape, they were being shortsighted. Who was going to be inconvenienced? Ada Kingston would see the house from her bedroom window in the winter; but she would see little of it in the summer when the trees were in full leaf. Professor Carmichael would be able to see it from his kitchen window. Emily Prout would see it from her living-room. "From *my* house," Luke continued, "*I* have to look at my neighbour's laundry hanging on the line most mornings, but if things upset me *I'm* big enough not to look. What I'm telling you is that if you turn these plans down you'll be acting against the community's interests. Turn them down and Marcalis won't build. If he don't build, he don't stay here. If he don't stay here, the community, I repeat, loses a big spender."

At this point Tom Allbright had a few words to say in favour of having a big spender come to live in the community. As the store-keeper, his attitude was avaricious; but his point that Marcalis might bring other rich people to the community was well taken—except by the Judge.

"It's my vote," Luke said, taking the floor again,

"that we look at the plans with a more broad-minded outlook. And before we come to that, I'd like to ask a few questions. I'd like to ask the Professor a question, as a start."

Professor Carmichael looked up from the notes that he was making in his capacity as honorary secretary.

"*You'll* see the house from your kitchen window, won't you, if it's built?"

"Yes," the Professor agreed.

"How much time do you spend looking out of your kitchen window?"

The Professor put down his pencil and smiled. "Only," he said, "when I help my wife with the dishes—and then I'm too busy to look."

There was polite laughter, for the Professor was much liked in the community.

"It wouldn't bother you, then?"

"I don't think so," said the Professor. "It would, I think, be a refreshing change from the endless redwood. I must confess," he said, turning to the Judge, "that I find these plans rather amusing."

The battle was lost. In spite of the Judge's final tirade against bad taste, the ruination of one of California's few unspoiled beauty spots by permitting the erection of such a monstrosity of a house, the plans were passed, only "Ma" Wedekind voting with him against the rest of the members.

That night the Judge sat until a late hour in his rocking-chair, chewing on a black cigar, the confidential report that he had received about Marcalis spread out on his bony knees. He never thought that he would live to see the day when the community would vote against a decision of his as to what was right for the village. But if that was their decision, he must abide by it and play

his part in supporting it. He opened the confidential report on Marcalis some time later and studied again the list of charitable donations that he had made—a recent one to a New York art gallery being large enough in itself to buy up the entire village. Was money the only thing that mattered any more? It seemed that it was—that and avarice, like Luke and Tom Allbright had displayed at the meeting. He tore the confidential report into little pieces before he went up to bed and let them fall into the Franklin stove, and watched them curl up and burn. He then walked up the creaking stairs to his wife's bedroom, still erect, but with a slower tread, as though he had aged suddenly since the afternoon.

They had to cut a much larger clearing in the woods so that they could build the Marcalis home. Its modern lines contrasted crudely with the redwood of the near-by houses: but, as Ben Truman said when he came up to have a look round, with all these trees to hide it it shouldn't show too much.

An elegant young man drove out from the architect's office in San Francisco at intervals to supervise the work, which a contractor from High Valley was carrying out because a house like this was out of Ben's class. Louis and Gladys Marcalis did not appear often in Drakefall Point until the house was completed: they were either in New York or travelling abroad. A decorating firm from San Francisco carried out the interior *décor* for them, on which no expense was spared; and many of the residents of the Bluff tiptoed over in the evening to look through the large expanse of plate glass windows to see, and discuss, what was going on: and the village folk from below stared over the fence at the house in wonder-

ment. Already a sign was hanging on the gate outside. *Catherine Cottage*, it read.

Catherine was the name of Marcalis's daughter.

IV

AS THIS IS A STORY of a small community tucked away from the noisy traffic in which four hundred people live in close proximity, day-to-day problems tend to become exaggerated, so that the simplest happenings become the subject of excited gossip each morning outside the Post Office. Until Libby came to live here, Drakefall Point had known neither drama nor tragedy. There had been minor scandals, such as the time, many years before, when the Judge's cousin, Violet, had to enter a home for inebriates. A few marriages, like Mrs. Rosali's, had broken up, which were greatly lamented. But news of these happenings did not reach the outside world. There had been a scandal about Luke Field's business, which some said he was able to play down by using bribery in the right places; but as Luke's business had been over in Oakland, Drakefall Point was not mentioned in the few reports that appeared about it in the newspapers at the time.

The scandal about Libby, which was to rock the community to its foundations before the summer season of 1953 had ended, was a different matter. It was to bring Drakefall Point prominently into the news, and was to affect the lives of many people. Yet the tragedies that were so soon to stun the village were not of Libby's making. A woman cannot be blamed because men fall in love with her. At the same time, she made one

unfortunate mistake—and most readers will forgive her, for she was young and human and unattached. Yet some may not.

Few people in Drakefall Point were involved in the actual scandal. Yet others appear, each playing a part. Already introduced have been: Tom Allbright at his store, Mark Featherbow at the Post Office; Dr. Braithwaite; Luke Fields; Ada Kingston; Judge Prout and his sister Emily; and the rich new arrivals, Louis Marcalis and his wife from New York.

Vaguely mentioned have been—Mrs. Rosali, Nancy Battersbury, Al Reindeck at his garage, “Ma” Wedekind at her snack-bar, Jack Taylor, whom Libby avoids seeing alone, and Professor Carmichael. Ben Truman, the local contractor, has also been mentioned although he plays no part at all except that he maintains the houses of the residents in a state of repair. But there are other people living thereabout whom the reader should know before the summer season arrives.

Jack Taylor plays no important role. Nor does the Rev. Davidson. Nor, if it comes to that, does Emily Prout—although had she not rented her house for the season the scandal would never have reached such proportions. Yet in introducing other characters in more detail, this story must, for a time, adopt the leisurely tempo of the people themselves, or their small foibles will not be understood.

Jack Taylor was Commodore of the local Yacht Club, owing to his proficiency as a yachtsman and to being an amiable fellow who got along well with the summer visitors. He had risen to become a Commander in the U.S. Navy during the war, and was still addressed by some in the village by his war-time rank. But he was better remembered, in far wider circles than Drakefall

Point, as an All-American football player for whom a brilliant future had once been forecast.

Jack Taylor was an attractive fellow, idle, with high principles but little sense of responsibility. His greatest weakness was that he drank too much and thought that nobody knew. But everyone liked Jack Taylor with his friendly smile and gentlemanly ways. He and Earl Braithwaite had been at the same university in the East and were, in fact, the only men in the village with college educations. They were close friends.

Jack's wife, Dorothy, also came of good family, her father having practised law in California's capital city of Sacramento. Had the depression of 1909 not swept away his savings overnight, leading to his premature death, Dorothy Taylor would have been better provided for. Forced unexpectedly to earn her own living, she took up nursing, for which she was eminently suited: but after working for a few years in hospitals, an oil well in which her father had once invested modestly turned out to be a 'gusher'—and she found herself possessing a small income. Having married Jack by then, she decided to devote her life to her home and to the raising of a family. As Libby had done—but some years earlier—she decided that Drakefall Point was a healthy place to live and raise her children—and she bought a house there. Jack Taylor then rented a small office in High Valley and became an insurance broker. He was never a great success, but friends gave him a little of their business out of the kindness of their hearts, not only because they were sorry for him, but because he was such a likeable fellow and it was hard to say no to him. Some of his earlier friends, remembering him in the heyday of his football days when his name was on everybody's lips, wondered how he could have married

so dull a woman, although they agreed that Dorothy had made him a good wife.

Dorothy Taylor, fond of good works, played the harmonium in the village mission each Sunday. She also gave lectures in the school-house, sometimes with magic-lantern slides. An upstanding young woman with straw-coloured hair braided over the crown of her head, she looked like a healthy Dane. She had a great sense of public service. Should a neighbour fall ill, Dorothy Taylor was the first to call with a thermometer and the offer of nursing. She was, in consequence, the busiest young woman in the community: but she was never in great demand socially, for even her lighter conversation was concerned with diapers, child welfare and child psychology. Her daughter, Peggy, she regarded as an infant prodigy.

A great change came over her life shortly before the grand opening of the Marcalis home, to which all the élite were to be invited. Louis Marcalis, meeting her at Ada Kingston's one evening and learning that she played the harmonium in the small mission church, lit another of his oval-shaped Greek cigarettes, upon each of which his monogram appeared in gold.

"That," he said, "must be difficult to do—playing the notes with your fingers and blowing the wind with your feet. You should not have to do both. Is there no organ they can have here where you play only the notes?"

"Organs cost money," Dorothy Taylor replied.

That evening Marcalis announced that he would not only buy the village a new organ, but he would build them a new church.

The Rev. Harold Davidson, until this generous offer, had travelled out from San Francisco by Greyhound bus

each Saturday afternoon to spend the night at Ada Kingston's house. In the morning he held Communion in the small mission for those who had been confirmed and wished to take the sacrament; held Matins at 11 a.m. with the aid of Dorothy Taylor at the harmonium; ate a pleasant lunch at Ada Kingston's table, with any other guests who might drop in or be invited; held a Sunday-school service at 3 p.m.; and was then driven by Ada's coloured help to San Rafael, where he caught another Greyhound bus back to San Francisco. His remuneration for each visit was guaranteed, but should there not be sufficient money in the collection plate Ada Kingston always made up the sum.

But there were other ways in which the neighbourly people of Drakefall Point showed their appreciation. The ranchers sometimes gave him sacks of potatoes and other vegetables to take home. Mrs. Rosali, the Protestant wife of an Italian wine grower in Sonoma County, living apart from her husband but unable to be divorced, often sent him home with a bottle of wine—for she still insisted upon receiving a monthly quota of her husband's products. Ada Kingston, who knew his birthday, always sent him a welcome cheque. Libby, who seldom went to church, sent all Melissa's baby clothes to Mrs. Davidson, anonymously, when she heard of her forthcoming confinement, thinking at the time how odd it was for the preacher's baby to be clothed in those worn by her illegitimate child. But Libby had known poverty, and she knew how it felt.

The old mission church was a converted bungalow which had been bought by private subscription, Miss Kingston being the largest contributor, and Ben Truman carried out the necessary reconstruction. This was large enough for normal purposes, but in the

summer this small and rather stuffy room was filled to overflowing, for the preacher was also popular with the summer visitors. In addition, the harmonium was always giving trouble with its bellows or sticking notes, and Miss Kingston had it in mind to see about finding another instrument, perhaps second-hand.

The Marcalis offer, therefore, to enlarge the present mission, to instal an electric organ, to build a house behind for the parson and his family to live in, and—should it be necessary—to guarantee that the parson received what he called a living wage, was received in astonished silence, which quickly grew into gratitude and applause. Even the Judge had to agree that thinking of the community's religious worship was the last thought for which he would have given the Greek credit. He was convinced, even so, that Marcalis was trying to buy his way in. He added a few words to Ada Kingston's gracious speech of acceptance, nevertheless, feeling that to be his duty as the community's second citizen. Besides, no one would ever say of him that he was a bad loser.

And so it was, when this story opens, that Marcalis had been permitted to build his ultra-modern house on the Bluff; the Rev. Davidson had been built a new church; and Dorothy Taylor, to her great enjoyment, was now playing the hymns each Sunday on an electric organ.

The lives of people other than the Rev. Davidson and Dorothy Taylor had been affected by the arrival of the shipping magnate into their midst.

Joe Murphy, who owned a dilapidated wharf near the Yacht Club and a few small boats which he let out on hire, was commissioned by Marcalis to purchase for him

an expensive speed boat. A few days later he asked Joe to buy him a cabin cruiser—the commission on both amounting to a welcome sum. And then, when Marcalis tripped over a broken plank on Joe's unsteady wooden pier, he decided that the present structure would be unsafe for his daughter, and he told Joe to build a safer pier. He would pay the cost.

Joe therefore laboured all the daylight hours to have a new pier ready for the season, when the small yachts of the summer residents, after caulking and repainting, would be put back into the water. Joe was well aware that fewer yachts had been moored with him during recent years owing to the rickety state of his jetty, but business had not been good enough to do very much about it. As Mr. Marcalis had told Joe to do a thorough job and to send all the bills to his secretary in New York, Joe began driving in stout piles to make a really sound foundation.

It was Libby's life that was to be dramatically affected. Marcalis had noticed her in the village street and had asked his chauffeur to find out her name—and he made a note of it. When Gladys insisted upon giving a party to 'open' the house—to which the 'right' people were to be invited—Marcalis asked to see the list of invited guests—and he added Mrs. Carson's name.

The cocktail party, in due time, was agreed to have been the most splendid and sumptuous reception the village had known. Not only was French champagne served in abundance, but waiters were imported for the occasion and a small string orchestra played softly in the background. The view of the bay through the enormous plate glass windows, which completely surrounded the house, everyone agreed to be breathtaking.

now that more trees had been cut down; and each conducted tour inside drew rapturous admiration, especially from the women. Even the Judge had to agree that the house was tastefully furnished, although from the outside it still looked like a goddam goldfish bowl.

The guests arrived sharply on time for the party, causing an early crush. The only exception was Libby, who arrived late in the proceedings wearing a smart blue tailored costume and neat white gloves to match her hat. She looked radiantly fresh and her small pert face showed—unlike the expressions on other faces on arrival—no sign of being impressed by the opulence of the occasion. When one of the hired men, whose duty it was to announce the guests, called out her name, Libby walked briskly across to shake her hostess by the hand.

There were some who thought it a pity that no one had tactfully advised Mrs. Marcalis that Mrs. Carson did not belong in the Bluff set. It is difficult, without some guidance, for a newcomer to know these things. But Ada Kingston spoke her mind. "What's wrong with the girl?" she asked in a booming voice of Emily Prout, who had been whispering into her ear. "You've got that girl on the brain."

"Well," Emily replied, rather taken aback, "I must say I never thought she'd be invited—*here*. How can she have met them?"

"Well, she quite obviously has—and what's more she's looking very well turned out." The majestic Miss Kingston, resplendent in a large and flowery hat, took another sip from her champagne glass and beckoned to Libby to come over.

Libby made a point, while talking to Ada Kingston, of waving to Dr. Braithwaite. Earl stands out in any

room, she thought. She also noticed the way his wife was dressed. Gloria and I, she thought, are the only two women who haven't dolled themselves up like Christmas trees. Dorothy Taylor, she decided, had bought that unfortunate hat especially for the occasion. Jack Taylor, on the other hand, looked handsome and well-groomed, bronzed and clean-cut, the typical naval type. She waved to him. Old Professor Carmichael, she thought, looked very neat in his blue serge suit. Luke Fields, wearing an open-necked sports shirt, was examining each piece of furniture in the room as though he had been engaged professionally to make an inventory. It was typical of Luke, she thought, not to put on a tie or even to wear a formal jacket. His wife, Norma, looking like an angry vulture, was drinking orange juice.

It was some time before Libby spoke to Louis Marcalis. She found him standing beside her later in the proceedings. She had noticed him many times in the room, but had made no attempt to go across and introduce herself. She had also noticed that while he was always the perfect host, insisting that the glasses of his guests should be constantly charged, he himself did not drink. And this third glimpse of him—for she had seen him twice in the village street—confirmed her first impression: he was one of the cleanest-looking men she had ever seen—a man whose shirt would be uncreased and snowy white however hot the day, a man, maybe in his middle fifties, still with a slim and youthful figure. Soft-spoken, as she was soon to discover, he moved gently about the room as though he wished to be inconspicuous. He reminded Libby of the great *mâîtres d'hôtel* she had met while dining in luxury hotels with Jerd during the war, men who are outwardly obsequious but at heart great

autocrats. She had watched him out of the corner of her eye and noticed the gracious manner in which he spoke to each of his guests, a manner that was wholly un-American and very *maître d'hôtel*. This intrigued her, for some of his new neighbours were inclined to become back-slapping after a few drinks.

Libby was talking to Mrs. Rosali when she found Louis Marcalis at her side, a small hand extended.

"I am Louis Marcalis."

"I'm Libby Carson."

"Have you done the grand tour yet?" he asked, with a diffident smile.

"No, I've been waiting for someone to show me round."

"I shall be a poor guide, I'm afraid, for I do not know the names of all the fabrics, nor the right names of the colours to describe them. When I was a boy, Mrs. Carson, there was dark blue and light blue; there was red and yellow and brown and black. Today the names of these colours in the hands of these modern decorators become quite unintelligible. But," he said, "if you will excuse my ignorance in these matters . . ."

His smile was again tinged with shyness. The precise way in which he spoke, the trace of a foreign accent, the European use of hands, the well-cut clothes—these things were in strange contrast to the happy-go-lucky life of Drakefall Point.

"I'd like to see round the house very much," Libby said, leaving Mrs. Rosali, who had already done the grand tour twice.

They went first to the patio below, which was flagstoned. The house, built on ground sloping down to the bay, was three storeys high at the back and one storey high in front.

"I always think," Marcalis said, "that with everything in life it is better to start at the bottom—and build upwards. Here," he said, with a vague gesture of the hand, "I suppose drinks will be served before dinner. There are, as you see, coloured umbrellas to sit under and comfortable chairs to lounge in. It is here that people will drink too much and say many things they will regret next day. That is, should they remember all the things they have said the night before. Do you drink very much, Mrs. Carson?"

"I like a highball before dinner."

"Why do people drink so much in America?"

"To get—high," Libby replied, studying the view.

"*You* do not drink—a great deal?"

"As I said, I like a highball before dinner. Perhaps two." She turned to him. "You do not drink at all, I notice."

His smile was enigmatic. "I am flattered," he said, "that I was noticed."

They later climbed the steps back into the house and together went into every room—the playroom for his daughter, Catherine; then into the living area with its expensive furnishings. They trod the lush carpets as they went into each suite—Catherine's bedroom in gay cretonnes; Gladys Marcalis's elaborate suite in rich satins; the more formal sleeping quarters for her host. After viewing the sun porch and the gleaming kitchen, they returned to the crowded living-room. The Judge, Libby noticed, whose normal tippie was straight Bourbon whisky, was finding all this French champagne a little heady.

"Mrs. Carson," Louis Marcalis said, snapping his fingers to attract a waiter's attention so that her glass could be refilled, "I would like to ask you a question."

He turned to her. "Do you like this house?"

Libby waited until her glass was refilled before replying.

"I think," she said final'y, "that the modern can be amusing. Especially in kitchens, where it's constructive and makes work easier. I think the modern, too, can be exciting in a setting like New York. But since you've asked me, Mr. Marcalis, I think to build a house like this in Drakefall Point was wrong. It doesn't belong."

"Please continue, Mrs. Carson."

She waited for him to light her cigarette. "You see," she said, "I'm from the East, too. But I've lived here long enough to know how people feel about changing—anything. You've changed a long-standing tradition, and upset many people. Most people here, too, are retired on small incomes. With taxes the way they are, it's hard for some of them to live. The standard of entertaining you've set is also far too high. You've already made it impossible for any of these people to invite you back."

"But I do not wish these people to invite me back."

She took another sip from her glass. "If that's the way you feel," she said, "I don't think you're going to get along in this place." She paused, and took another sip from her glass.

"Please go on, Mrs. Carson."

She smiled. "Haven't I already said—enough?"

"You are right, in any case. It was ostentatious for us to give a party like this. In New York my wife engages a small orchestra to play for her cocktail parties, and I suppose it has become a habit. I appreciate your frankness." Turning to her, he said, "But with the same frankness, *you* must find it dull here?"

"If I do, I don't let people know."

He drew a slender gold cigarette case thoughtfully from his pocket and took out a cigarette. "Why did you choose to live here, Mrs. Carson?"

She shrugged. "In the first place, it's cheaper."

"Groceries, one of my admirable new neighbours informed me this evening, cost more at Mr. Allbright's store than they do in the city."

"But you spend less on clothes—and rents are less."

"Your house, I am told, is quite close to here."

"Yes, I live below Nancy Battersbury."

"On the Bluff?"

She smiled. "No, Mr. Marcalis—not on the Bluff."

"How long have you lived here?"

"A couple of years."

"You have become very well-liked during that time."

"People are kind up here," she said, thinking how pleasant it was to drink again from a glass that didn't come from the dime store. Although her long dark eye-lashes were lowered as she admired the exquisite glass between her fingers, she was aware that her host was studying her. She glanced at him. His thinning hair was brushed back sleekly from his forehead. He was, in fact, nearly bald. Against the pallor of his skin, his brown eyes, usually alive and penetrating, seemed suddenly mysterious and vague.

"I have always found," he said, "that kindness in life is not enough."

"It depends what you're looking for," she replied. "I came up here to find kindness—and I found it."

"You mean, Mrs. Carson, after you parted from your husband. Was he unkind to you?"

"You ask embarrassingly direct questions, Mr. Marcalis," she said, after a pause, placing her glass on to a table beside her. "But I'll answer you. He was

actually the kindest man I ever knew." She then stubbed out her cigarette and said that she must be going.

Libby searched out Gladys Marcalis to thank her and to express her appreciation of the house, but Gladys was in no condition to be thanked. Swaying a little, and slurring her words, she waved a glass in the direction of the bar and told Libby to stay around and get herself another drink. What did people want to leave for? Weren't they having a good time? Libby made a point of threading her way through the crowd to say another word to Ada Kingston; and smiled a greeting towards the Judge, who was now growing very red in the face. As she reached the hall the imported major-domo from San Francisco had her coat ready and helped her into it. He opened the door and a cold December wind blew in from the Pacific. •

Libby was aware suddenly of the fragrance of a Greek cigarette. Louis Marcalis stood outside under the newly-built porch, thoughtfully smoking. He insisted upon seeing her into her car, in spite of the rain.

As she drove hurriedly down the hill to reach Tom Allbright's store before it closed, she wondered how she came to be invited, for she had not met her hosts before—and she was the only guest who did not belong to the "Bluff set". But she was far more interested in the fact that someone from the really big world outside had entered the community.

Libby was ironing a week later when the telephone rang. It had rained all the week and she finally had to ask Dorothy Taylor if she could borrow her electric clothes-dryer; for Libby was constantly washing for Melissa and herself and the amount of wet laundry now hanging about in her kitchen was getting in the way.

As the telephone rang, Libby stood the electric iron on to its end and hurried into the living-room, first turning off the radio and smoothing her hair. She lit a cigarette before lifting the receiver in case it should prove a long conversation.

"This is Louis Marcalis speaking."

"Oh—I thought you'd gone back to New York."

"I had to return to San Francisco on business."

"Where are you speaking from?"

"My house here—in Drakefall Point. Are you especially busy at the moment?"

She laughed. "I'm ironing," she said.

"At what time will that admirable task be finished?"

Libby glanced at her watch. "In about half an hour," she said. "Why?"

"I wonder if you could perhaps drive over and visit me for a moment? I have a proposition, Mrs. Carson, that I think might interest you."

She glanced down at the comfortable fur-lined slippers that she wore when alone in the house during the winter months and decided that they were getting a little shabby. "Could we discuss it over the telephone?"

"It is not a matter I wish to discuss over the telephone, Mrs. Carson."

"I see . . . Well, could we discuss it in the morning?"

"Tomorrow I leave early for San Francisco, Mrs. Carson. I am flying to Florida."

"I see," Libby said again. "Well, I'm afraid it's impossible to come over right now. You see, my child's in bed."

"That is too bad."

"Perhaps Mrs. Marcalis could discuss what you have in mind tomorrow?"

"My wife is already in Florida, Mrs. Carson."

"Are you up there alone?"

"My chauffeur is here."

"I do not make a habit," she said, "of visiting married men alone at night, Mr. Marcalis," and she wondered if she had made that remark sound ruder than she actually intended.

"That is rather foolish of you, Mrs. Carson, for in all questions of business it should not matter whether a person is married or unmarried—or whether it is eleven minutes past nine in the morning or eleven minutes past nine in the night. I had not imagined that you would so quickly absorb a small-town attitude." Libby stubbed out her cigarette. "But as that is your point of view," he continued, "there seems no use in discussing the matter further."

"Mr. Marcalis."

"Yes?"

"If you give me time to find a baby-sitter, I'll be right along."

The chauffeur opened the door when Libby arrived at Catherine Cottage half an hour later and helped her out of her wet raincoat before leading the way towards Louis Marcalis's book-lined study. Marcalis rose casually from a deep armchair, putting his book aside and removing heavy-framed glasses. A table was set up with drinks, Libby noticed, and fresh dry logs had recently been placed on the fire and were already crackling into flame. The room, which had two large bowls of flowers, was softly lit.

Marcalis extended his cigarette case after Libby was seated.

"I'd rather have a Camel," she said, getting out her own.

"There are American cigarettes in the box beside you, Mrs. Carson." He waited until she had taken a cigarette from the box, when he lit it for her with a gold lighter, and walked over to the drink tray. "I hope you did not get wet driving over."

"It's raining quite hard."

"You would like a drink?"

"Not at the moment, thank you."

She watched him pour out a glass of Shasta water. There was something a little frightening about Louis Marcalis, she thought, although she was not in the least frightened. He rather intrigued her—a man who had fought his way to great riches with a cold and calculating brain. When he first landed in America, Ada Kingston had confided at the party, he spoke only Greek. Today his English, though precise and pedantic, was almost faultless. She turned back to the fire and watched the pine logs roaring into flame. There was a small branch of madrone on top, which was burning more slowly.

She was aware that Louis Marcalis was standing beside her.

"You were born in Livingston, Illinois, Mrs. Carson?"

She glanced up. "I was—yes. But it would be interesting to know how you knew."

"I make it my business," he said, "to learn all that I wish to know about anyone I may employ. I know the name of the street where you were born—and even its number. You did not have an easy childhood, Mrs. Carson?"

Puzzled and annoyed at this intrusion into her private life, she glanced up at him again. "Well, what if I didn't?" she asked.

"There is no disgrace in being poor," he replied. "I have been poor in many places. I was poor in Athens.

I have been poor in Alexandria. I have been poor in Smyrna. I once almost starved in New York. There is no disgrace in that."

"No," she agreed, turning back to the fire again and noticing that the madrone branch had now caught alight. She liked madrone trees. They were hard to saw up into logs; but when their bark peeled their limbs looked almost human—like arms and legs burned brown in the summer sun.

"So," Marcalis was saying, "we have something in common. We have known what it is like to be poor. On you it has left no scars."

I suppose I can take that as a compliment, Libby thought, but I don't see where all this is leading.

"There is something else I know about you, Mrs. Carson," he said. "You are unmarried. It is better, I think, that I lay my cards on the table."

She threw her cigarette into the fire and was already on her feet. "What has my private life to do with you!"

"Your private life has nothing to do with me," Marcalis replied. "I merely tell you what I know so that you will be under no misapprehensions. In my relations with people, Mrs. Carson, I make it my business to learn everything about them . . . and then to let them know what I know. It is a simple rule that I have followed since I was a boy."

Her eyes narrowed as she looked at him, her hands still tightly clenched. "I don't think," she said, as calmly as she could, "that any proposition you might make to me, Mr. Marcalis, could interest me."

He shrugged. "Is it not better that I find out before I employ you that you are unmarried? Would you prefer that I employ you as a married woman—and then have to learn the truth?" Again he shrugged.

"But if that is the way you feel about it, there seems nothing more to say." He pressed the button of an electric bell by the side of the fireplace, reaching there as though by instinct. "But I would have thought," he said, "that a woman of your intelligence need not have such simple things explained to her. I do not blame you for your child. I merely tell you that I know about it. Our association would then begin—shall we say?—on the right foot."

The chauffeur entered. Libby had to think quickly. She knew when she decided to drive up here that some skilful fencing might be necessary before the visit was over, leading, in a devious way, to a proposition where her body would be concerned—a thrust that she could parry, even with a man like Louis Marcalis. In the fencing, up to now, she had successfully parried no thrust: she had only lost her temper.

"Mrs. Carson is leaving," Marcalis announced casually across her shoulder.

"I didn't say I was."

Once more Marcalis shrugged, this time a little wearily, as though his patience were at an end. "But you just said that my proposition would not interest you."

"I haven't heard it—yet."

That was a very stupid remark, she thought. I must do better than this. But I'm not leaving this house until I know what was behind the Greek's mind when he invited me up here at this hour of night. I can always turn him down—and I shall. But I'm not going to leave here, in any case, while he holds the upper hand.

"I'll be leaving in fifteen minutes," she said, looking at her wrist-watch and addressing the chauffeur. To regain her composure she added imperiously "As it's raining,

will you bring my car round to the door?" She then took another cigarette.

Harry Bicroff retreated. "Very good, madam," he said.

A gold lighter flicked into flame at her side and she accepted the light. Looking at Marcalis hard, she said:

"Don't you think it's a little un-American to pry into people's lives?"

"I had imagined you to be more intelligent than you appear to be," he replied, studying her.

Steady, Libby thought. No more temper. But she had better hit back, so she said:

"And for a man of big business you take an interminable time coming to the point."

"I needn't have told you that I know about—your child. That is something I actually admire. Many women in your position would have given the child for adoption. It takes courage to do what you have done. But I told you so that you would know, on your side, something of the man who may employ you. Your secret will be safe with me. That is what I wanted you to know. But you have a failing, Mrs. Carson, that I had not anticipated: you speak first and think afterwards. That is a bad fault, which you should learn to correct."

"I've managed to get along very well without your advice up to now, Mr. Marcalis." This kind of fencing was new to her, but she would do better—in time. "You invited me up here to discuss some proposition. Do you think we might now cut out irrelevant matters and get down to it?" That was better, she thought, for her voice had authority.

Marcalis walked over to the bookshelves and idly removed a book. "Mrs. Carson," he said, glancing across at her, "for me it has been easy to give my

daughter, whom I also love, the things in life to make her happy. For you it has been more difficult. You have to watch the spending of every dollar and every cent. That you have done so much for your daughter on a small income is another reason I would like to help you by offering you employment. You would not then be worried by such things as grocery bills, and you, shall we say, are still a little behind in the payment of certain of your charge accounts . . . are you not?"

There was something sinister about this man, and he infuriated her: but she was still determined to know what lay behind his mind. He could not have known about Melissa, until he set sleuths searching into her past. And why had he searched in the first place? It was stupid to get angry at him; for it seemed that he was purposely baiting her, trying to put her at a disadvantage. So she answered casually:

"Sure I'm a little in the red, but I'm almost in the clear. Now do you think you could stop wasting my time and tell me what you asked me up here to discuss?"

Marcalis replaced another book further along the shelf where its height made more symmetry, before turning to her. "It is a very simple proposition, Mrs. Carson. I wish you to take care of this house when we are not in residence."

"You want me to *live* here?"

"No, Mrs. Carson. I do not expect you to live here." He paused, and then in a more conversational tone he continued, "I have worked hard during my life, Mrs. Carson, so that I can enjoy luxuries as a boy I did not know." With a gesture of a hand, he added, "This house I have decided shall also be a small luxury. I wish it to be kept at all times so that I can come to it when I feel inclined. I am a man of moods. Most men

who achieve their ambition in life, Mrs. Carson, become men of moods. There is nothing left for them to conquer. Some play golf to while away the boredom—but I do not play golf. I may decide,” he said, “at a moment’s notice to fly out here. Harry Bicroff, my chauffeur-valet, can then drive me over in the daytime to Berkeley to see my daughter, and I can spend my evenings quietly in my study here. I therefore wish this house to be ready at all times—fires to be burning, the ice-box filled with food so that Bicroff, who is also a good cook, can walk straight in and start preparing dinner.” He glanced round the room, as though to remind himself of any item that he had omitted. “And always flowers,” he said. “Flowers to be in every room. I am very fond of flowers, Mrs. Carson.”

Libby inhaled. “What you’re wanting, then, is a housekeeper?”

Marcalis shrugged. “I had never thought of giving what I want a name. I just need the things I have told you.”

“I see. What are you prepared to pay?”

Again Marcalis shrugged. “Two hundred a month. Three hundred, maybe.”

“But that’s ridiculous. You could get a cleaning woman to come in for a few dollars a day.”

“I do not want a cleaning woman.”

“But someone has—to clean.”

“I expect you to find such people for me and to pay them. Not, of course, from your salary.”

“How could anyone possibly earn three-fifty a month just supervising?”

“Actually,” he said, with point, “the outside figure I mentioned, Mrs. Carson, was possibly *three* hundred dollars.”

"Three hundred, then. It's still crazy."

"Is anything crazy, when you wish for it and can afford it?"

"No," she said, "I suppose it isn't, looked at that way."

"Then how does the proposition appeal to you?"

"It'll need thinking over," she said. She was actually thinking that three hundred dollars a month, while it lasted, added to the smaller income that arrived each month for Melissa's support, would enable her to buy a new car and have necessary repairs done to her house. Inhaling, she asked:

"Is this your idea, or one you've discussed with your wife?"

Marcalis paused, momentarily. "A good question," he said. "I will answer it. The idea is my own."

"I see."

"My wife, Mrs. Carson, does not care for this place. I doubt she will spend much time up here."

"I see."

"Are there any more questions?"

Libby thought quickly. "Yes," she said. "As you've made it your business to find out so much about me, I'm sure you've also learned that I'm a bad manager—even for myself. There are women in this village who could do this job on their heads. Why are you offering this job to me?"

"Also a good question and also a simple one to answer. I do not like to have dull or unattractive people near me."

"Do I take that as a compliment, or are there other angles to the job?" It was better to have things straight.

Again Louis Marcalis shrugged. "It could lead to

many things," he said. "You are, so I hear, an expert stenographer."

"I was—once."

"I shall sometimes need a good stenographer."

Well, the job's now making more sense, she thought, watching Marcalis light another of his Greek cigarettes.

"It had been my intention," he said, blowing a thoughtful smoke ring, "to pay whoever I decide to employ in cash."

"Why in cash?"

He looked across at her disapprovingly, as he had done a few moments earlier. "Mrs. Carson," he said, "I cannot believe that you are as stupid as you wish me to believe. Do you not know that a transaction—shall we say between friends—where cash passes, need not be declared for income tax?"

Again she looked at him, hard. "In your private investigations, Mr. Marcalis, you appear to have been misinformed about one thing. Cheating on income tax is not one of my vices."

"Then if you prefer," he said, blowing another smoke ring, "although I still think you are foolish, my secretary in New York will send you a monthly cheque instead."

V

TONY FLORINO, rowing ashore in the darkness from his fishing boat after a successful catch, wondered if Ma Wedekind had remembered to cook him a spaghetti dinner.

Tony's father, Mario, still lived in the village, working as part-time gardener for Ada Kingston, Judge Prout

and Professor Carmichael, and keeping the gardens of certain of the summer residents from becoming overgrown. Father Mario, born in Turin, and still able to speak only execrable English, found life in America a constant puzzle. Further, his son was wayward and difficult to control. It was a pity, he often thought, as he trimmed Ada Kingston's hedges or pruned the rose trees at Judge Prout's, that Tony had inherited the good looks of his mother. It was better for a man to be born ugly and to have to fight that disability, as he had had to do; for good looks can lead a man into temptations that he had never had to face. But Mario loved his son; and being a widower he felt a deep responsibility towards his only offspring. Devoid of the education that Tony had received in America and his ability to use fluent English, Mario Florino was always left second-best in any argument with his upstanding, handsome and head-strong fisherman son.

Tony tethered his row-boat to one of the new piles that Joe Murphy had recently sunk and climbed the rickety and rotting pier and hurried along it. He had some fish wrapped in an old piece of burlap to give to Ma Wedekind. He had always liked Ma. When he was a boy she often served him ice-cream and then pretended, when he handed her a warm dime from his pocket, that there must be some mistake, as if she had served him no ice-cream. So Ma Wedekind always had the largest of his crabs, half a salmon at least, or some abalones, when Tony put into the bay at Drakefall Point after a successful trip—or even when the catch had been poor.

Tony hurried along Joe Murphy's wharf; and, ashore, walked along the side of Tom Allbright's store and crossed the road. There were some cars parked outside the only neon sign in the village, which read—*Saloon Bar*

—*Cocktails*; but Tony did not like Kurt Grunther, who owned the bar. Nor did he like hard liquor. Tony drank red wine—and not very much of that.

A radio was playing softly when he entered Ma Wedekind's snack-bar, and a few people were sitting on high stools at the counter, talking and drinking coffee. Heads turned round as Tony pushed his way robustly through the swinging door.

"Hi, Ma!"

"Hi, Tony!"

He placed the fish, wrapped in its dirty burlap, on to the counter. "Put this in your ice-box," he said, grinning.

Ma took the gift gratefully. "I saw the lights of the boats as you came in," she said, "so the spaghetti's ready."

He ate ravenously and drank many cups of coffee. An hour later he and Ma Wedekind were alone. He then reached into his pocket and produced a small madonna that he had whittled out of a piece of wood and gave it to her shyly. Tony, with a pen-knife, could carve expertly; and when having nothing better to do, his hands were usually whittling a piece of wood into ingenious shapes, although small boats were his speciality. This madonna was his most ambitious subject, and he had made it for her during the trip. She thanked him and placed it lovingly on a shelf behind her.

"How's Libby?" he asked a moment later, lighting a cigarette.

"Fine," she answered, wiping the counter over with a cloth. "Just paid a deposit on a new automobile."

"What kind?"

"A Ford convertible. Painted red."

"But Libby ain't got that kinda dough."

"Well, she's got that kind of car," Ma answered with a shrug, pushing aside the salt and pepper shakers as she wiped. "Bought herself a new dress, too. *I. Magnin*."

"Those cost money, Ma."

"Sure they do, but she's bought one. Paid cash, too, for a change."

"That sort of crack ain't like you, Ma. Libby can't help it if money gets tight sometimes. All of us get tight for money."

"Yes, but that girl puts on airs."

"Well, she's got class. She's different."

Ma shrugged and reached behind her for the coffee pot and refilled Tony's cup. "She's no good for you, Tony. You know that. She'd never marry a fisherman. Why don't you find yourself a nice girl and think about settling down?"

This time Tony shrugged. "What do I want to settle down for?"

"If you think you can go on visiting her at nights when you're home and not have the community know, you'll have a surprise coming."

"No one's going to know," he said. "Libby's smart. Fixed a way so that no one sees me coming or going." He paused and tapped his cigarette thoughtfully into the saucer. "Libby's the only dame I've ever known, Ma, with real refinement," he said reflectively, still tapping his cigarette. "She wasn't easy to make the first time, believe me, but she needed a man, just like any other dame. But it surprised me, somehow, that she'd be passionate, too. She's wonderful, Libby is, but she spoils you for other dames. . . ."

"Wouldn't be good for her reputation here, if it got around."

He looked up. "You're the only one who knows."

Ma Wedekind's face looked very tired as she poured herself a cup of coffee. "But," she said, "you oughtn't to have told that—even to me."

"Why?"

She glanced across the counter into Tony's inquiring blue eyes. He was the only Italian boy that she had ever seen with blue eyes. She began taking an interest in him when his mother died, feeling that he needed a woman's influence and care. She had since grown to look upon him almost as a son. She wanted to tell him that no gentleman would disclose the name of the woman he was sleeping with: but she knew that it was now too late for him to learn this elementary rule. Tony was a healthy young animal, still with the heart of a child. To explain this simple truth to him would confuse and even anger him, for Tony's blood was wholly Latin and when roused his temper flew into ungovernable rages. She avoided a truthful answer and merely replied:

"Well, *I* might tell—mightn't I?"

"*You* tell, Ma!" he cried, laughing at the suggestion. "Why, I trust you like I trust the Virgin Mary!"

Libby had fixed a cowbell on her gate which tinkled as the gate swung open. It was a recent acquisition, purchased in Petaluma when she decided that Tony was a need in her life. Her neighbours now heard the bell clang when anybody came to call: and it tolled again as a visitor left. But by tiptoeing down to the gate at night and placing a cloth inside before lifting the cowbell off its hook and placing it below among the ferns, no one would hear a visitor arrive—or depart. And if the visitor avoided using the gravel path up to the house and walked on the grass instead, and the blinds in the house were drawn and the front door was left

discreetly open, Tony could enter and leave in secrecy.

A further item in her plan, since everyone knew when the fishing fleet was in, was that on the nights that he would visit her Tony should eat his dinner at Ma Wedekind's, where he would be seen. He was to stay late there. He would then go to his father's ramshackle house on the waterfront and play his favourite records in his upstairs room, as he always did before retiring; and around midnight he would turn off the phonograph and his bedroom light. As Mario Florino, sleeping in the next room, was growing deaf, it was simple for Tony to take off his boots and tiptoe from the house.

There was another aspect of the liaison that she had to provide for. Melissa might wake up in the night and come to her room to sit on her bed and talk. She therefore told Melissa that she did not wish to be disturbed, as she used to be. She was growing into a young woman now, she said: she was nearly nine years old. If she found that she could not sleep, she must take a book and read until she was tired, as grown-ups had to do. But if she had a pain or anything like that, she must—of course—come to her room at once. Libby then planned to lock her bedroom door on the nights that Tony would visit her, which would allow Tony time to exit through the window should there be a knock.

Libby disliked all this furtive planning. She disliked, even more, being deceitful with Melissa, for trust held such a high place in their relationship. She was too young at the moment to understand what prompted all this secrecy: and by the time that she was old enough to understand, she hoped they would both be leading a fuller life elsewhere, for this affair with Tony had no permanence. Since Jerd, Libby had allowed few men to touch her life with any intimacy. Had she found a man

of Jerd's attraction she would have married him. There had been many opportunities of marriage; but when a decision had to be reached she found herself making comparisons with Jerd and she finally said no. It was an unsatisfactory state of affairs, but one that she could not alter, unless she were prepared to accept second-best and to give the same standard in return. This affair with Tony—a man even without intellect—was therefore as surprising to her as it was unpremeditated. Yet after their first affair on his boat—which her own strength was unable to prevent—she consented the next time, willingly. Before the fishing fleet last put out to sea his nightly visits had become a habit. She was not, in any way, in love with him. Between them there was no mental meeting ground whatsoever.

She had met him at the square dancing at the school-house and was fascinated by his strength. She had never seen a man so strong. During the interval for refreshments he had shown off his muscles, challenging every man in the room to feats of strength and making each of the men look puny. He had danced with her that night, and although his fun was boisterous it was junately, gay. As she looked up into his laughing face she became aware that he had beautiful teeth. She liked his curly black hair and his clear blue eyes, as blue as the ocean on which he earned his livelihood. Because his old jalopy was at Al Reindeck's being repaired, she drove him home after the dance to his father's small and rotting house on the waterfront. On the way home he offered to take her for a trip on his fishing boat next day.

That is how it had begun. She had not intended it ever to begin. When they went out on his boat he allowed her to take the wheel: and when they were far out to sea he set a bearing on the iron mike and they

fried hamburgers in the small galley while the boat kept its course, and the wind blew in their faces and the lurching movements of the boat kept throwing them together, laughingly at first.

As Libby looked back to the beginning of their affair, there seemed no harm in it. Both of them were free. In the village of Drakefall Point there were few unmarried men, and Tony had an exciting, primitive attraction. On his boat he was lord of all that he surveyed, a master mariner, afraid of nothing, a good-looking buccaneer. He spoke with authority of the sea, the currents, the tides, the different fish and how he caught them. His knowledge, and his supreme confidence, made her humble. Ashore, it was a different matter: in her living-room he seemed out of place and clumsy and was forever playing the phonograph, or sitting with jutting feet whittling pieces of wood and scattering the shavings about the floor. They seemed, ashore, to have nothing in common, for Tony did not even read, except for the headlines in the newspapers and the comic strips, or a sensational murder case which he devoured. His taste in music was the hottest type of jazz, played *fortissimo* on Libby's record player. He seemed most at ease when he romped with Melissa, playing wolves or bears or climbing trees. But he had a naiveté which was most endearing, and a zest for the simple pleasures of life which Libby grew to find infectious, so that she joined in the boisterous games played on the living-room floor before Melissa went to bed.

When Libby heard that Nancy Battersbury and Brenda Ford, whose constant calls at the house with trivial gossip were growing irksome, were spreading stories around the village about Tony spending so much time at her house when he was ashore, she decided to put a

stop to wagging tongues, and daytime visits were curtailed, by mutual consent. Tony, in this instance, reacted like an adult. From his point of view, in any case, the excitement of his visits lay in the hours when Melissa was asleep. Libby, who was already growing bored with Tony's immaturity, was relieved of having him sprawl around her house for hours each day, interfering with her domestic chores and filling the house with noise and untidiness. But her moments alone with Tony, which were supremely adult, were those that mattered, for each was young and free and vitally alive.

And so she had purchased a cowbell and hung it on her gate. She was aware that few women in the world have not, at some period in their lives, taken steps to hide an affair from parents, the world at large, and sometimes from a husband. She disliked all this furtive planning, even so. She went down, nevertheless, on the night that the fishing fleet came in, and took the cowbell off the gate.

VI

PROFESSOR CARMICHAEL AND HIS WIFE had owned a house in Drakefall Point for many years. On his retirement from the faculty at the University he and his wife, as many others had done, decided to make their summer residence their permanent home.

A tall, slightly stooping, figure with white hair and a gentle smile, Professor Carmichael was a distinguished addition to the all-the-year-round life of the community and was greatly welcomed. Once his large library had been carefully installed into the more cramped quarters of Hobart Lodge—which was the rather pretentious name

that a former owner had given to the house—Professor Carmichael, who had beautifully neat handwriting, looked around to see where his declining energies could be usefully employed, for he was a man of public spirit.

His hobby was to keep records of the weather, recording neatly in a book the high and the low temperatures each day, the hours of sunshine, and anything of an unusual meteorological character. But in local affairs he was soon to find himself acting as secretary to certain of the local organisations, charitable or otherwise; he was also acting as secretary to the Improvement Association under the chairmanship of the Judge. He was, in fact, far busier than he had been while teaching history.

But there was one secretaryship in Drakefall Point that he would never be asked to fill. Efficiently presided over by Ada Kingston, the Garden Club had Emily Prout as its secretary, and a committee of women. The roots of the Garden Club were, in any case, more social than horticultural, and the committee members were largely chosen from those residing on the Bluff. Few of the young women in the community were invited to become members, for the elderly and mature regarded the Garden Club as their own, although Dorothy Taylor was invited to become a member as soon as she arrived in the community because her parents in Sacramento, while they were alive, were known to Ada Kingston.

The members, with notable exceptions, did not attend the meetings to improve their horticultural knowledge: their monthly meetings were an occasion to wear their new summer clothes, and to see what other women had bought, or made over, for the season. But the great attraction—apart from being formally conducted over a neighbour's garden and walking through homes that had been given a special polish for the occasion—was the

tea that was served after the formal business of the club had been dispensed with and the gardening talk delivered usually by some minor authority imported for the occasion. There was always more talk afterwards about the refreshments than there was about the lecture, some considering that a member-hostess might have taken a little more pains about the arrangement of her table and, if it came to that, have been a little more generous in supplying a wider variety of dainty fare.

Such remarks were sometimes repeated to a hostess, leading to bitterness and even to open feuds. It was difficult, sometimes, for Ada Kingston to keep the peace, as it is anywhere in the world where a club has only women members. Judge Prout, whose own garden was a show piece, always made a point of being absent when the members of the Garden Club paid their annual visit to see his rose trees and to enjoy the tea presided over by his ailing wife, Maud. "Can't stand all those cackling women," was his usual comment as he left his home by the back door.

It was with some surprise, therefore, when the club met at the beginning of the 1953 summer season in Ada Kingston's drawing-room to conduct their formal business and to report upon the club's finances, to hear their president later propose Mrs. Carson for membership. Emily Prout, who had opened the proceedings by reading the minutes, tossed her pencil rather pointedly on to the green-baize-covered table, which faced the audience, when Ada Kingston removed her pince-nez and asked for a member to second her proposal of electing Mrs Carson to membership.

There was a moment's hesitation, as heads turned from left to right among the members, some feeling about it as Emily Prout did. It was Dorothy Taylor

who seconded Libby's election to the club. As one of the most earnest young people in the village, she resented all forms of snobbery. Besides, Libby Carson had recently given her husband Louis Marcalis's new house to insure plus the insurance on a speed boat and a cabin cruiser.

Ada Kingston's heart was large and continually expanding. While she maintained a Victorian code of manners and of dress and held rigid views on morals and morality, there were many in Drakefall Point who knew, to their advantage, that Ada Kingston was broad-minded. She was, of course, a staunch Republican—which many of the villagers were not—and she held views as rigid as the Judge did, politically. She had now started to listen, on the Judge's advice, to this young and promising radio commentator, Hilton Sands, who expounded the Republican point of view so tellingly. But Ada Kingston's mind was more pliable than her stormy neighbour's and she could adapt herself more easily to the changing times.

By high and by low, by rich or by poor, Ada Kingston was universally loved and respected. She had an uncanny intuition about people and seemed to sense their problems. There were many families in Drakefall Point, even living on the Bluff, who had been eased over a financial crisis by a merciful cheque, accompanied by a letter in Ada's large and flowery handwriting, in which the recipient was made to feel that he or she were doing Ada Kingston a personal favour by paying the cheque into their bank account at the earliest possible moment.

As the accepted matriarch of the village, she also looked to its future. A new generation would one day

have to take over: and as she looked at the younger generation there were few outstanding personalities—except Mrs. Carson.

It was for this reason that she made it her business to learn more about her. She had heard that Mrs. Carson was well-liked among the younger set, which was a good beginning. From Emily Prout, some months before, she had heard that she was behind in the payment of her account at Tom Allbright's store. She therefore sent Libby a cheque, with the same gracious letter to accompany it, only to find the cheque returned with an equally courteous reply. True, many of the people to whom she had sent cheques in the past had tried to repay her; but few had ever sent a cheque back. Discovering for herself that Mrs. Carson was really in financial straits at the time, she admired her action all the more. Ada liked people who were proud.

She had heard rumours that Mrs. Carson was living apart from her husband: and when attending the prize-giving in the school-house, Ada asked the schoolmaster, Gwynne Jones, if she could meet the Carson child, and Melissa was dragged unwillingly towards her and urged by Mr. Jones, in ingratiating *sotto voce*, not to be shy.

"And where is your father, child?" Ada Kingston asked graciously, bending down to speak to her after Mr. Jones had left them alone together.

Little Melissa fidgeted nervously with the pleats in her prize-giving dress. "I don't know, ma'am," she finally whispered.

"Does he write letters to you, dear?" she asked, bending lower and putting an arm around her. "Nice letters like daddies write to their little girls?" Melissa remained silent. "You have a daddy, haven't you? You know him?"

Melissa shook her head and continued to fidget with the pleats in her dress, looking down shyly, too, at the new party shoes that she was wearing for the occasion. "Santa Claus brought me," she explained at last, "but I'm always asleep when he comes, you see."

Before Melissa hurried away, she curtsied hastily—a gesture that delighted Ada Kingston. No child in the village had ever addressed her as 'Ma'am', and no child had ever curtsied. Her mother must have quality, she decided, rising to her full majestic height, adjusting her marabou stole as she watched little Melissa rejoin a group of her friends in the crowded and now noisy classroom. A pretty child. She had seen her many times in the village, but she had never spoken to her before. Her hair was fairer than her mother's, but she had the same graceful charm. Whoever her father was, she decided, he's of good stock. That child has breeding.

Driving home after the prize-giving, Ada, whose life had been built upon good manners, remembered again the slight curtsy and the old-fashioned manner of address. She resented the present-day "Hi" with which many of the children now greeted her in the village, some of the little rascals holding her up with a toy tommy gun and using the slang they read in their comic books. She liked the way, too, that the Carson child believed that she had been put into her mother's stocking as a happy Christmas gift. The mother must have nice ideas to have thought of telling her that. It was obvious, even so, from what the child had said, that she had no father. She had heard that Mrs. Carson had served overseas with the Forces during the war—which no other young woman in Drakefall Point had done—and Ada was a great patriot. If the child, as she now suspected, was illegitimate, then she must be the result of some war-time

misalliance. We were all proud of our boys and girls in the war, she thought, as she drove into her garage and parked the old Cadillac beside the small Chevrolet that she kept as a spare. We couldn't do enough for them then. What right have we to look askance at them now? But mainly she began to take an interest in Mrs. Carson because she had taught her child to have good manners.

Mark Featherbow closed the Post Office at the stroke of six each evening. Those who left each morning to work outside the village and arrived home after 6 p.m. could, if they had box numbers and the key with them, still enter and collect their mail. But Mark, as a government employee with a deep sense of his responsibilities, never stayed open a second after the time stipulated in his instructions. By two minutes past six he had locked up his safe in the inner office, bolted down his hatch in the wall, and was on his way home.

Mark still lived with his mother, and many wondered why he had never married. He had tried other jobs before deciding to enter government service, and had studied hard to pass his examinations. For Mark was not blessed with high intelligence; he was the plodding, methodical kind, and had, as his mother knew, adopted this same approach in matters of the heart, so that each recipient of his attentions grew bored at the slowness of the courtship and found another beau. He was also a man of few words, being sometimes almost monosyllabic, except with his mother. To her, few secrets were ever hidden and he spoke quite volubly.

As Mark entered his mother's house on the day that Libby was elected a member of the Garden Club, he wiped his boots carefully on the mat, although the day was dry and sunny, and hung up his hat.

"Been busy, Mark?" his mother called from the kitchen, where she was preparing supper.

"Yes and no."

"Anything happened at all?"

"Don't think so."

"Hear Libby's been elected to the Garden Club?"

"Yes; I heard."

"What right's *she* to be elected when Nancy Battersbury's never been invited? She's lived here longer."

"Nancy's come through the operation okay," Mark said, picking up the evening newspaper as he entered the front room. "News just came through."

Mrs. Featherbow joined her son, drying her hands on a paper towel. "Was it a growth or a cyst?"

Mark sat in his favourite chair. "A growth. Not malignant, though." He opened the newspaper with a snap and stretched out his legs.

"It's a godsend it wasn't malignant. Earl did the operation, I suppose?"

"Yeah."

"We're lucky to have Earl, Mark."

"That guy's okay."

"Will she be in the hospital long?"

"Not too long."

"Did you hear Libby's taking care of little Jill?"

Having scanned the headlines, Mark turned to the racing news. "Yeah, so I heard."

"Dorothy Taylor offered to take care of her."

"She'll be happier with Libby."

Mrs. Featherbow finished drying her hands. "There are kind folk in the world," she said, after a thoughtful silence while her son went on reading. "A godsend it wasn't malignant. Want your supper early, son?"

"When it's ready." •

"No other news today?"

"No."

Mrs. Featherbow walked back into the kitchen. Mark seemed preoccupied lately: he hardly spoke during meals and went into his own room after helping with the dishes. There couldn't be anything wrong at the Post Office, because Mark had been congratulated only last month on the increased revenue. And now that Mr. Marcalis had built a house here, revenue should increase still further; for Mark had told her that he conducted a large correspondence which he sent by air, or registered, mail. Drakefall Point needed more people like that, people who weren't careful about the cost of postage. As she dished up the supper she decided to talk to Mark.

"Anything worrying you, son?" she asked later in the meal, noticing that he had eaten only half his hamburger.

"No."

"You've never, as I know, lied to your mother yet."

"We all get moods. Get tired of seeing the same faces, I guess. All through the year till the summer visitors come, I know when I open my hatch in the morning I'll see Kurt Grunther standing the other side. He's always first in line. He does all right in his saloon and could afford to rent his own box, but that tight-fisted son-of-a-bitch still owns the first dollar he ever made."

"Well, son, perhaps he likes the gossip."

"I even know what he'll say—'Morning, neighbour, what do you know?'"

"I don't see anything wrong in that, son."

"No, but it gets on your nerves."

Mrs. Featherbow took away her son's plate and placed it on the drainboard. She had been postmaster at Drakefall Point before Mark was born, and she still helped him at busy times. "Why don't you take a little

vacation before the summer visitors arrive, son?" she asked, placing a large helping of apple pie before him and passing the cream. "I'll take over, son. My arthritis don't trouble me now the weather's warm."

"*You* take it easy," he said, looking up at his mother and then at the apple pie on his plate. "You know, *Ma*," he said, "I often think if I took a slug at Kurt one morning when I open the hatch, I'd feel better."

Mrs. Featherbow put an arm around her son. "I used to feel that way, Mark, sometimes. The same faces every day do get on your nerves." But, as she returned to her own chair, she knew that the routine arrival of Kurt Grunther every morning was not the real cause of her son's moodiness. He was in love with Libby Carson and he wasn't making the grade.

But Mark was not the only troubled male in Drakefall Point: Al Reindeck was also a disappointed man. Libby's new convertible only needed an oil and grease job every thousand miles. It was not the smaller monthly statement that troubled him: but while he kept her old Chevrolet on the road, she was in and out of the garage all the time. He now saw less of her—and it rankled.

Nancy Battersbury, lying in her hospital bed in San Rafael after the operation, looked at Libby's expensive flowers. She looked at them for a long time. Libby, she had to agree, had been good in coming across some evenings and playing canasta before she came to the hospital, running errands during the day, bringing up her mail and giving her the latest gossip of the village. But, at heart, she had never liked her. As an older resident she resented the excitement that her arrival caused; and she still resented the way that she had quickly usurped her position as the accepted leader of the

younger set, as though it were her right. If Libby had not arrived in the community she might have had the job with Louis Marcalis, and that thought alone maddened her. Unlike Libby, she had told no one that she worked in an office in Los Angeles until her husband got a better job and was appointed manager of a firm of chain store jewellers, at their San Rafael branch. Nancy let it be known, largely by inference, that she had married beneath her. To help establish this fact she covered herself with every form of cheap jewellery, which her husband could buy at wholesale prices, and sometimes even borrowed from the store for a special occasion. She also wore black silk pyjamas with diamanté trimmings at the small parties that they occasionally gave, and smoked through a long green holder. To impress the simple villagers still further, she drank vodka.

Then Libby Carson arrived in the village.

She put on no airs. Her parties were simple and straightforward. Libby told everyone that she had worked in an office until coming to Drakefall Point: and it was galling for Nancy to discover that Libby had been private secretary to an important banker in Chicago—a commercial eminence that Nancy had never achieved, being an indifferent typist at best. Libby, too, without any attempt at showing off, had, it appeared, led a really social life before coming to settle here, sometimes mentioning famous restaurants in New York and Washington at which she had dined, places that were bywords of luxury and fame. The only really big hotel that Nancy had ever entered to have dinner was one in downtown Los Angeles when there was a convention.

It galled Nancy still further to find that the two most attractive men in the community—Jack Taylor and

Earl Braithwaite—seemed always to leave her side at the first convenient moment after Libby entered a room. And now Libby had become the most envied young woman in Drakefall Point, being taken up by Marcalis, a millionaire, buying her clothes at *I. Magnin*, and running around in a new red convertible. These things might have been hers, if Libby hadn't arrived.

When a nurse came into her private room (for Nancy could not stand the indignity of a public ward and Ada Kingston was paying the difference in price) Nancy asked her to remove Libby's flowers from the bedside table and to put them on the dressing-table across the room. Those flowers must have cost all of fifteen dollars, and the fact that Libby could afford that kind of money angered her still more. She would have preferred not to have had them in the room at all—except for the glamorous impression that they would give to any visitor. With the exception of a cheap bunch of flowers from Brenda Ford, they were the only ones that she had received, in any case.

The Rev. Davidson, now comfortably settled in the new bungalow behind the church, looked forward to a busy season. He was finding that the bracing spring air was having a beneficial effect upon his wife's health and also upon the baby's. He set about his daily business with zest, rising early, calling upon the sick, visiting the aged, and making a fourth at bridge, should it be necessary. A tall, well-built fellow in his late thirties, he made friends easily. His parish work had been facilitated by Ada Kingston lending her small Chevrolet for him to drive around in, and this made it possible for him to visit any of the sick from the village who might be in hospital in San Rafael. It was through Ada's thought-

fulness that he was able to visit Nancy Battersbury.

After the usual solicitous inquiries on arrival, the Rev. Davidson knelt by the side of Nancy's bed. He first thanked God for bringing her safely through the operation, and prayed to Him for her speedy convalescence. He then said the Lord's prayer, Nancy whispering from her pillow in unison; and rose to his feet.

Nancy felt no embarrassment about the prayers, but such a moment might have been embarrassing in other hands. A moment before, Nancy had been telling him how long her scar was and tracing on the white coverlet of the bed its exact position on her abdomen. In the same way, after this unexpected moment of prayer had ended with its final Amen, and the Rev. Davidson had risen to his feet, his manner was at once easy and relaxed, as though this solemn interlude had never happened. Nancy liked that about him: so many parsons tended to overdo their jobs.

Seated a few moments later on a chair beside the bed, the parson talked of local affairs—how Joe Murphy had almost finished his new wharf; that Judge Prout had recently sent two men to the county jail, which some thought rather a harsh sentence, for exceeding the speed limit through the village street. "But," the parson agreed, "I saw them myself. They really were going much too fast. It would seem they were having a race." His eyes twinkled as he said, "If I ever have to appear in court, Mrs. Battersbury, I hope it won't be in Judge Prout's—on any offence committed in his village."

"It isn't *his* village," Nancy said, plucking idly at the counterpane, "although from the way he acts you'd think it was."

"A very fine gentleman, the Judge. He has been most helpful to me."

"If he has, it's because it suits him."

"Oh—come, Mrs. Battersbury," the parson said jovially.

"Well, I've lived there longer than you have. *I have* to pay *my* taxes, just as the Judge does. I don't see what right he has to think he's better than any of us, strutting about the community like he owns it. Who is he, after all? Only a small-town judge."

The Rev. Davidson glanced at his sick parishioner as she lay pale-faced upon her pillow. She was pretty, in a commonplace way, but the lines around her mouth and the tightness of her lips did not indicate a pleasant character. He had already heard that Mrs. Battersbury wished to take a far more active part in local affairs than had hitherto been her lot, and had set her heart upon being elected an officer of the Parent Teachers Association so that she could have more say in the education of her child—apart from becoming a figure in the community life. The parson did not tell her, therefore, that Dorothy Taylor had been elected the local President of the P.T.A.—although she would soon hear the news—because when visiting the sick he carefully avoided subjects which might cause temperatures or blood pressures to rise.

To change the subject, pointing across the room at the flowers on the dressing-table, he said airily, "How charming! Someone with a great love of flowers—or beauty—must have chosen those."

"Yes," she said, "they're pretty, aren't they?"

"From someone who has taken great trouble, I would say."

"Libby Carson sent them."

The Rev. Davidson turned in his chair. "Mrs. Carson?" he said, questioningly. "Tell me about her, Mrs. Battersbury. She does not come to my church, and so far I've not called on her, though I will. She seems very popular."

Nancy plucked again at the counterpane. "What do you want to know?" she asked.

"I hear many stories of her kindnesses. I also have visual evidence in this room."

Here we go again, Nancy thought. Even the parson's singing her praises now. I'm getting sick and tired of it.

"I suppose she's kind," she said at last.

"She appears," the parson said, glancing round the room to see if there were any more vases, "to be one of the few who have thought of sending flowers to you."

"I had a lot more sent, only they died yesterday."

"And she is, so I hear, taking care of your little daughter while you're incarcerated here."

"There's nothing to that. I've had her kid staying for nights on end."

"Does Mrs. Carson, then, go away often?"

"Well, since she's been working for Mr. Marcalis she goes into San Francisco and spends a night or two when he's out here on business. But don't ask me what she has to *stay* there for."

The parson was aware of the venom behind that remark, but he was not to be side-tracked. "A strange man, Marcalis," he mused, wondering if he could smoke a cigarette. "But a man of great public spirit. The village is most fortunate to have him build there. But tell me more about Mrs. Carson. She appears to be a young lady of great talents."

"She's smart, it's that's what you mean."

"For a man like Marcalis to employ her is a great compliment."

Nancy continued to pluck at the counterpane. "Where's the compliment?" she asked. "She used to be a stenographer. She applied for the job as soon as Mr. Marcalis arrived because she was short of cash again and thought working for a millionaire might get her some place. I'm not saying," she added, still plucking at the counterpane, "that she has to sleep with him to earn that kind of money, but it does look odd—doesn't it?—the way she's now throwing money around and running his house as if she owned it."

The Rev. Davidson saw no point in continuing this conversation. So he knelt again by the side of Nancy's bed to say a final prayer. In a moment of silence before he rose again to his feet, he included a prayer of his own, asking his Maker to relieve his village of slandering tongues and petty jealousies.

VII

IN THE SAME LAZY TEMPO, spring at Drakefall Point passed slowly into summer, and nearer to the arrival of the summer visitors. Tom and Rosie Allbright were especially busy getting their store ready, increasing their stock and arranging for extra help to deal with the coming rush of business.

The night before the summer visitors were due to arrive Tom Allbright surveyed his store from behind his counter, well satisfied that nothing had been overlooked. A vain man, Tom Allbright considered himself to be one of Drakefall Point's most upright citizens, but

there were few who agreed with that assessment. A tall, florid man in his sixties with resonant voice and white hair, he gave the impression, at first meeting, of strength and kindness. Handsome, in a coarse way, he could show courtesy when it suited him; but Tom Allbright had little kindness in his heart: he thought only of cents and dimes and how to turn them into dollars. He was, too, the dogmatic, tub-thumping type. Anxious to please, his manner could be polite and at times obsequious. In anger he was foul-mouthed. When customers were behind with the payment of their accounts he was ruthless. But he always sang loudly in church each Sunday to show that he was a godly man.

There were many in Drakefall Point who knew him for a hypocrite and a humbug. It was, even so, convenient to market at his store, especially if any of the residents found themselves short suddenly of bread or coffee or wanted some rashers of bacon in a hurry. It was far more pleasant to drive over to the friendly stores to market at Inverness or Point Reyes Station, but often there was no time to do that; and the cost of gasoline, for many, had to be watched. And so Tom Allbright continued to be in business because his store was a convenience, and because everybody liked his wife. Many people who complained about his prices (and about his rude manner if accounts were overdue) vowed that they would never enter his store again. But they always relented: to take their business away would hurt Rosie's pocket—and her feelings. They didn't care a damn about Tom's.

He surveyed his store once more that evening. He had introduced new lines of merchandise to interest the summer customers and Rosie had set them out in attractive displays. He walked along each counter checking

the price tags, wondering if he could still give a higher mark-up for his canned goods and coffee. He was already charging a cent or two more than the stores over at Inverness; but, as he always told himself, his store was a few miles farther away from the city and people should expect to pay more.

While he was considering the question of risking higher prices for his new lines of merchandise, Al Reindeck hurried over to buy another lamb chop because a cousin had arrived unexpectedly and was staying to supper. Tom, who had thought business was finished for the night, was very happy to oblige.

"Hear it's Hilton Sands who's rented Emily Prout's house," Al said, having given his order.

"Yeah," Tom replied, reaching inside the glass-covered counter under which his meat was displayed. "So I heard. The other folks who'd rented it had to go East."

"We're getting some fancy people up here this summer," Al commented.

Tom wrapped the lamb chop and handed it across the counter. "I listen to the guy on the radio when I can," he said. "Don't always agree with him, mind. But then, Al, as good Americans we must learn to get along with folks who don't share our political beliefs. I've always voted the straight Democratic ticket, as my dad did before me. I don't hold with intolerance. I don't hold with intolerance over religion, either. As Americans, we can do a lot of things that a lot of people in the world today can't—we can *vote* the way we like, and we can *worship* the way we like. I was brought up in the Baptist church, but that don't prevent me attending the Reverend Davidson's church, which is Episcopalian. See what I mean?"

"Sure," Al answered, edging towards the door, for he knew each of Tom's views from their constant and lengthy repetition, and his wife was waiting. "Sure," he repeated as a bell rang above the door as it was opened, "but for my money, Tom, Hilton Sands has them all beat."

Tom watched Al close the door behind him and hurry across the street. It was after seven o'clock now, and he supposed there wouldn't be any more business, so he might as well close for the night. He would have to be up early in the morning, in any case, with the summer visitors arriving, so he walked over and bolted the door. But he was still wondering if he could risk putting some of his prices up still higher. Walking back into the store he stood for a moment wondering if he could afford the risk. He then called up the stairs to Rosie, asking her to make supper a little later, and he started to make out new prices. After all, the world was full of suckers and the summer visitors had plenty of dough.

There are two more characters to introduce before the summer season opens—Hilton Sands and his wife, Virginia.

This happily-married couple, like many other American parents, allowed their children to rule their lives. Their elder daughter, aged ten, had spent part of last summer's vacation staying at Emily Prout's house, with family friends who had rented it for the season: and on her return she announced very firmly that she would never spend a vacation again anywhere else but Drakefall Point. Hilton and Virginia then drove up from their home in Burlingame to look the place over, and became enchanted. They arranged nothing about it at the time, however; and when they

made inquiries in the spring there was no house available for rent. Then Emily Prout's house became unexpectedly available, and they took it.

Hilton Sands was one of the freaks of radio—one of the lucky ones who leap unexpectedly into prominence and become a household name. His work was to give his unseen listeners the news each day, also dissecting and explaining the country's internal problems, and then the complicated issues of day-to-day world affairs, reducing them to a level where smaller mentalities could understand them. Such work does not normally gain such popularity. Yet millions of people in northern California—and even in neighbouring States where radio sets could reach them—tuned to his programme each evening to learn what was happening within their own great land and in the world outside. Hilton Sands seemed to answer so many unasked questions, and a growing audience listened to him nightly, weighing his words as he explained, too, America's problems of world leadership, with its grave responsibilities. He did not speak as an idealist: he dealt realistically with facts. Many mothers with sons fighting in Korea felt better for his explanations and took greater pride in the fact that America had not shirked her duty and that their sons were now fighting for Freedom overseas. At the same time, he would trounce any irregularity in high places at home, denouncing Senators and Congressmen by name if he felt that they were acting improperly or for private gain and without world leadership at heart. He trounced, especially, the Lobbyists and Five-percenters who tried, for commercial ends, to influence the decisions of the country's elected Government, and he was ruthless in his comments. While in some circles he was regarded as too altruistic for his day and age,

even his few enemies had to agree that he, personally, was a man of the highest principles.

He was at Harvard, studying law, when his father died leaving his family in straitened circumstances, and he then left his law studies and took a job. He gravitated to radio after working on a newspaper as its political correspondent; and, being a keen student of history and a prolific reader and informed on most topics of the day, he soon found a niche for himself as a commentator on world affairs.

The war gave him the opportunity he needed. Having lost a leg in an automobile accident many years before, he was unable to join the Armed Forces. Destined to spend the war years at a radio station, he built up during those years a considerable reputation and a listening audience, and soon had important sponsors bidding for his services. Many said that he had moulded his style on Edward R. Murrow. Some preferred him to Fulton Lewis, Jr., whose political opinions he seemed to share. But all commented upon the queer magic of his voice, which held his listeners spellbound.

Now that he was appearing on television, as well as his female listeners had seen him on their screens, his popularity increased still further: for Hilton Sands was a handsome man of thirty-eight, tall and distinguished in appearance. It pleased his women listeners to find that he was attractive to look at as well as being so interesting to listen to, and his first T.V. appearance caused heart-flutterings in many living-rooms along the northern Californian coast. Few of his women listeners knew, however, that he had only one leg.

BOOK II

I

FROM FRIDAY AFTERNOON THE SUMMER VISITORS started to arrive in Drakefall Point, each car loaded high with luggage, some with a trailer behind hauling a boat, some with trailers merely carrying extra luggage. As each car or station wagon descended the winding road to the village it drew up at Tom Allbright's store while the owners went inside to buy groceries, to say hello to Mark Featherbow and to ask if there was any mail; and to say hello to each other and to rejoice that summer was here again. By the end of the week-end all the houses were in occupation and the village street each morning became as busy as a town.

As Libby came out of the Post Office on the Monday morning she ran into Freda Kemp, whose rich father owned a summer house near the Yacht Club.

"Hi, Libby," was her friendly greeting. "What's this I hear about your working for the great Marcalis? Like it?"

Libby glanced casually through the mail, some of which was addressed to her new employer. "Yes," she said, "I like it very much."

"Have you met the daughter?"

"Several times."

"What's she like?"

Libby placed the mail into a gay canvas marketing bag. "A large and frightened faun," she replied, waving across the street to Dr. Braithwaite, "but sweet."

"Pop said he saw you having dinner with Marcalis at the Fairmont the other night. You're certainly getting around these days."

"Mr. Marcalis," Libby said, accenting the *Mister* and waving again to Earl as he drove away, "always stays at the Fairmont. Being a busy man he can only spare time while he eats to discuss such matters as his house."

"Oh—I wasn't suggesting anything wrong," Freda said. "And you'd better not."

Freda hastily agreed.

"And if it's any interest to anybody, I'll be having dinner with Mr. Marcalis at the Fairmont tomorrow night. It will be a threesome. His daughter will be there. I'm driving her back here after because she's decided to have her convertible painted another shade." She patted Freda's arm. "Drop by for a drink tonight."

"What time?"

"Around six."

With a friendly smile Libby left the rather perplexed Freda and crossed the street. Her usual parking place was taken and she had to walk round to the back of Tom Allbright's store. She then drove to the Marcalis home, to find that many of the summer visitors were staring at it over the new wire fence. She waved to those she knew as she drove through the rather pretentious modern gates that the architects had insisted upon over Judge Prout's final protest, and entered the house. Lulu Pereira, an elderly Portuguese, was giving a final polish to the house.

"'Morning, Lulu."

"'Morning, Mrs. Carson. I'll be through by dinner time."

Libby smiled. "Lulu," she said, "in *this* house dinner takes place in the *evening*."

"That's right, Mrs. Carson. That's what you told me."

"Around one o'clock Mr. Marcalis and his family have *lunch*."

"That's right, Mrs. Carson."

"And this room isn't called the Parlour."

"No, Mrs. Carson."

"It's called the Lounge."

"That's right, Mrs. Carson."

"Well, get these names in your head, Lulu, in case you ever have to speak to Mr. Marcalis. He likes things called by their right names."

Lulu Pereira nodded and went on polishing some brass. As Libby proceeded in the direction of what the architects referred to in their plans as the "sleeping area", Lulu looked up again from her work and gave a toothless grin. "A mighty fine man, the new boss. Gave me ten bucks the last time he was here."

"And I expect," Libby answered over her shoulder, "if you call things by their right names and don't upset any more flower vases he'll give you another." She smiled again to the house-cleaner and went into Catherine's room to see that all was in readiness for her arrival. She looked into the guest rooms, which in two days' time would be occupied by Catherine's friends; and she glanced into the luxury suite, which had the finest view of the bay, where Gladys Marcalis would sleep if she ever stayed here. At the end of the passage was the owner's suite, and she glanced inside there, too. Everything was in order.

Entering the study, she closed the door behind her and walked over to the desk and sorted the mail into two. Placing her own to one side, she lifted the telephone and asked Tilly, the operator on duty, to get her on to the Fairmont Hotel, first inquiring after her mother's cold. She waited as she heard an operator in San Rafael relay the number, humming softly.

"Mr. Marcalis, please." And then a moment later,

"Hello, it's me. There's a letter from your wife. Shall I bring it in tomorrow?"

She could hear Marcalis inhale his cigarette. "Why not bring it in tonight?"

"I can't tonight."

"Why?"

"Well, I've asked people in for drinks."

"That is too bad," he said.

"Is Catherine with you?"

"No; she will be here tomorrow."

"I can't explain over the phone, but I won't come in tonight. That is," she added, "if you don't mind."

She heard a cigarette being inhaled again. "Then come early tomorrow. Around five."

"I'll be there—on the dot."

"Did Bicroff deliver the orchids?"

"Yes; they're quite lovely."

"Tomorrow, then—at five."

Libby replaced the receiver. What a strange, lonely little man he is, she thought. He'll eat alone in his suite, chain-smoking his Greek cigarettes, his tiny feet in neat slippers, not even speaking to the waiters who attend him. He'll then read until he goes to bed, or sit compactly in an armchair amid a haze of smoke, planning his business deals. How odd it is, she thought, that a man can have so much money and yet have so little fun out of life. Collecting pictures seemed to be his only outside interest: and when he bought a Van Gogh or a Modigliani—pictures that she herself was learning to appreciate—he stood before them, chain-smoking and silent, not wishing to be disturbed. And yet, in spite of this unexpected gentleness and love of beauty, he could be ruthless. It was fun working for him, even so.

She picked up her own mail from the desk and walked

into what the architects referred to in their plans as the "cooking area" and cast her eyes over the glistening chrome in the kitchen and the spotless white paint. She had engaged a coloured cook to take care of the family during the summer and Clarabelle was arriving by Greyhound bus in the morning. The refrigerator was well stocked. There were flowers in every room. She could now go home and arrange the cocktail party that she made a habit of giving on the first Monday of the summer season.

As Libby drove contentedly towards her house, she wondered if Melissa had put her toys away as she promised so faithfully to do. If she did that, Libby had told her, she could then put on her new party frock and hand round the canapés at the party. But she thought, with a smile, there must be no repeat of her last performance when she offered the canapés only to her favourites, like Earl and Jack, and refused to offer any to Nancy Battersbury. Melissa was so personally beloved that it was difficult to be angry with her. As Libby drove her car through into the trees in front of her house to allow her guests room to park on arrival, she thought how strange it was that Melissa should be so like Jerd in her ways—a father she had never seen. There was naturally a physical resemblance. Unlike her own hair, which was brown, Melissa had Jerd's fair colouring. She would obviously grow to become tall, like Jerd. But she had so many of his mannerisms—the way she walked in long, graceful and thoughtful strides; her slow and engaging smile; her quiet way of speaking with a slight lisp; the jerky little movements of her hands when she was excited, as though trying to snatch words out of the air to explain her meaning or to find hurried excuses for some naughtiness. At the moment she

suffered from shyness with strangers, but when that shyness melted she was adorable. She might not grow to become a raving beauty—although that was possible, too—but she would certainly become a heart-breaker in a few years time. The little poppet, happily, seemed unaware of that fact at the moment.

Libby parked the car among the trees and picked up her groceries from the back seat. As she crossed the gravel patch towards her house she was sure that Melissa would have put all her toys away tidily, because if there was one thing she liked above all else it was to hand round the canapés at a cocktail party and have the guests make a fuss of her. But what's wrong with that? she thought, smiling again as she opened the front door. Don't all women?

Jack Taylor closed his insurance office earlier than usual and drove home. He always, before a party, took time in the shower and over dressing. He was not a conceited man, but he took pride in his appearance. Some of the people attending Libby's party placed insurance with him and it was always good to look prosperous before a client. As Commodore of the Yacht Club he would also meet some of its members, with some of whom he had seen service in the war.

The summer season, for Jack Taylor, was the difference between life and complete stagnation. Uninterested in his business, he found seeking insurance among his friends a menial task after his position as naval Commander in the war: and the routine of living, with the monthly problems of finance, was a dull and worrying way to end his days—and a dreary prospect. But he saw no alternative. Dorothy owned the house that they lived in and was an efficient manager. He admired her

enormously, but he had long ceased to love her. He resented the fact that she was always right, as he resented people in the village thinking that she was far too good, for him. About the latter he was prepared to agree—which did not help to bolster his morale. Jack Taylor, once in the limelight as an All-American football player, found inactivity the hardest thing to face—which is why he drew up too often at Joe's Bar on the way home; for Dorothy, who controlled the budget, had liquor in the house only when they were entertaining, although unknown to her husband she kept a half-bottle of whisky hidden in case of medical emergency. And so Jack Taylor stopped most nights at Joe's Bar, slipping a piece of chewing-gum into his mouth before getting back into the car so that when he kissed Dorothy chastely on his arrival home she would not look at him askance and say, "Have you been spending money again on *liquor*, dear?"

It is true that there had been nights when he had forgotten to take the chewing-gum precaution, which had led to Dorothy smelling his breath and asking the question that so long had irritated him. But he was able to say, on those occasions, that clients had dropped by at his office and that he had had to take them out and entertain them, pointing out that such expense would be deductible from income tax.

But Jack Taylor had less feeling about the futility of life as he drove back to Drakefall Point on the first Monday of the summer season. For a short period he would be someone of importance again, mixing with his own kind, wearing a yachting cap in his off moments and being treated with jovial respect. There was no reason, in addition, for him to stop at Joe's Bar that evening, for there would be plenty of liquor at Libby's.

She was one of the younger set who never gave a party unless she could do it well.

Jack Taylor liked Libby far more than he cared to admit. A moment alone with her at the Yacht Club dance last season had shaken him profoundly: for Jack, although his married life was now barren of excitement, had never cheated on Dorothy. In the war he had brought Dorothy a fleeting glamour with his rank and uniform, but he had been a dismal failure as a wage-earner and to cheat on her at this stage of their marriage would be a lowdown trick. Libby, in the middle of a dance, had asked to see some improvements that he had made to his boat and they left the crowded dance floor and walked down in the sultry night air to where the *Grasshopper* was tethered. Libby danced beautifully and their bodies seemed always to move as one; but it seemed that she had held him more tightly that evening, and he had held her more tightly, too. There was scent in her hair as they stood together on his boat. He put an arm around her in a brotherly way, at first. In a moment she was in his arms, her warm mouth pressed close to his and he felt every curve of her body throbbing against him. All resolution left him then, and they stood in the darkness, swaying in a long embrace. But she stiffened, suddenly, and looked up at him with eyes that seemed to him to be profoundly troubled. "This mustn't happen, Jack," she said. "We live in this place. Besides, Dorothy's worth more than both of us put together. Now let me go, please, and let me go back alone."

He watched her leave the boat. He watched her walk along the jetty in her white flowing dress and climb the steps. He watched her enter the slanting floods of light from the opened windows of the Yacht Club and pause to powder her nose, put on lip-stick and tidy her

hair. He watched her until she disappeared into the music. He then ran his hands down the front of his white tuxedo and then through his curly fair hair. Wiping lipstick from his mouth with a piece of rag, for he did not want to use his handkerchief, he screwed it angrily into a ball and tossed it into the ebbing tide. Hurrying along the jetty and climbing the steps to the club-house in search of Dorothy, he found her waltzing serenely with the Rev. Davidson.

That had happened almost a year ago. Realising that the winter lay before them and that he and Libby would have to meet daily in the village, he made a point of speaking to her before the dance was over. "I'm sorry about just now," he said. "I'm sorry, too," Libby answered, smiling up at him. And through the winter months Jack had wondered what she had meant by that reply. He thought of that often as he lay in bed with Dorothy beside him. He thought of it when Dorothy was talking about the P.T.A., the Garden Club, Child Welfare and her many other interests. It was a question to which he wished he knew the answer, but one that he would never try to solve. When they met during the winter at the square dancing in the school-house, at the whist drives or the poker games, Jack Taylor acted as though that moment aboard the *Grasshopper* had never happened. And Libby seemed to prefer the moment to be forgotten, too. They had, if anything, become firmer friends. She had even passed along to him the insurance on a speed boat and cabin cruiser belonging to Mr. Marcalis. For all he knew, Mr. Marcalis might be a guest at the party.

And so, as he drove finally down the hill into Drakefall Point that evening, he decided to wear his white tuxedo. It would make him important in the room: and he could

always say, if any of his clients should ask, that he was going on to another party.

Mrs. Rosali was an early arrival at Libby's cocktail party. As the amateur contributor to the local *High Valley Gazette*, writing paragraphs on the social life of Drakefall Point, Ethel Rosali was invited to every village function and her small social column each week was read avidly in the community. It is true that she found far less to report than the contributors from the larger outlying communities to which the *High Valley Gazette*, with an eye to circulation, offered similar space. But Ethel Rosali, proud of her village, was determined that her column should not be shorter than her competitors': and knowing that the editor was inclined to use his blue pencil heavily, she always over-wrote in order to allow for this contingency. When any young mother gave a birthday party for her child, Ethel reported the number of candles on the cake, the name of each child invited, what each mother wore for the occasion and—so long as it was not embarrassing—what each mother had brought as a gift. Her position in the community was unique, for she was as welcome on the Bluff as she was in the village below. People in all walks of life like to see their names in print, and to achieve a paragraph in the *Gazette* brought happiness into many homes: and so before many of Drakefall Point's inhabitants decided to give a party, they first ensured that the date would be convenient for their social correspondent. A large, jolly woman in her middle fifties, she was kind to everyone. It was generally agreed that Ethel had never written a bitchy line since Drakefall Point started to have its social column.

As she entered Libby's house early that evening to

obtain in advance the names of those who were invited lest she should by some mischance leave out a name, she was enchanted by the way the living-room had been done over, and she hastily made notes of the colour scheme and of the pattern of the new drapes, seated on a sofa, a large highball at her side. "Honey," she said, surveying the scene, "it's gorgeous." She also noticed Libby's new cocktail dress and made a note about that as well, fingering the fabric. She also noticed a beautiful vase of orchids standing on a side table.

The first guests to arrive were the school teacher and his wife. Mr. and Mrs. Gwynne Jones drank only fruit juice, but Libby had their favourite kind already iced in a jug. The thing that Ethel particularly disliked about Gwynne Jones was his greeting, for she had such an abhorrence of clammy hands. These four made trivial conversation until the other guests arrived. The Rev. Davidson, who had now made his official call, brought his wife and they both accepted a highball and talked pleasantly. Freda Kemp arrived with a basket of strawberries. Mark Featherbow, wearing a new sports jacket, seemed disappointed to find that he was not the first arrival, for he had asked his mother to take over the Post Office so that he could be there early and talk to Libby alone. Nancy Battersbury, making her first appearance after her operation, walked with a stick, using it, Ethel Rosali thought, with unnecessary emphasis. Then a steady stream of guests arrived and the room became noisy and overcrowded.

Ethel made many notes as she sat on the couch having court paid to her by each new arrival, noting this and that. She made a special note of the white tuxedo that Jack Taylor was wearing, thinking what a tragedy it was that after such a promising start in life he had

slipped so easily into obscurity. She noted that Dorothy Taylor was wearing the dress that she bought specially for the opening of the Marcâlis house, and wondered why no one had ever told her that she should never wear mauve.

Then Hilton and Virginia Sands entered the room.

Ethel Rosali, looking again to make sure, slipped her small note-book into her handbag and rose quickly to her feet. As she smoothed out her dress, she saw Libby go across to greet them and she thought how natural and gracious a hostess she was. When it came to her turn to be introduced, she liked the way, too, that Libby described her as a journalist; and told Mr. Sands that she had also appeared on the radio. Actually, the only occasion that Ethel had ever spoken on the air, and that a very nervous one, was when she sat on a small panel of housewives and, as one of the panel, was asked to give her opinion of woman's place in the home. But Libby had such a capacity for putting people at their ease. Mr. Sands, too, seemed to receive the news about her one appearance on a radio programme as being of importance. They must talk about that later, he said, passing on with a charming smile.

Ethel watched the reactions of the other guests. A pity, she thought, that Naney Battersbury always simpers when good-looking men are around. A pity, too, that Mark Featherbow had so little social grace and became abrupt of manner when ill-at-ease. Jack Taylor, she noticed later, seemed to be getting along well with Mr. Sands, talking laughingly in a corner, a glass always in his hand. When Earl and Gloria Braithwaite arrived, the doctor and Mr. Sands got together immediately and were soon talking away as if they'd always been friends. She noticed how Libby was

taking care of her guests, always seeing that their glasses were filled; and she noticed how on one occasion Mr. Sands took her aside and they had a long and gay conversation, Libby so young and pretty as she looked up into the face of the man she would describe in her column, quite obviously, as the guest of honour: and she noticed the glumness of Mark Featherbow's face while this conversation was taking place. She made a special note of the dress that little Melissa was wearing as she handed round the canapés: and she noticed again the way that Mr. Sands always had a gracious smile for his hostess as she passed. And then, in due time, Mr. Sands came over and spoke to her, as he had promised.

Ethel found Hilton Sands a delightful conversationalist, although he did not ask again about her one appearance on the radio: but he talked with easy authority about the intrigues in Washington, the problems confronting the United Nations and especially of the Korean truce talks. He spoke with apparent intimacy of political figures, giving Ethel a feeling of being made privy to Cabinet secrets. Virginia Sands had been equally gracious and enchanting, and was a lady in every sense of the word.

Driving home, Ethel decided that this really was a feather in Libby's cap. Everyone had taken it for granted that Ada Kingston would give a party for Hilton Sands, where he would meet other residents of the Bluff and be entertained later by those whose invitations he cared to accept. That Libby should be the one to launch him on the village, Ethel thought, might even make a headline in the *Gazette*. On arrival home she hurried to her portable typewriter to write her column while every detail of the party was fresh in her mind.

While the gaiety had been proceeding at Libby's cocktail party, on the other side of the hill at Judge Prout's house a more sombre scene was being enacted. The Judge had received a telephone call from Louis Marcalis that afternoon asking—if not ordering—him to come immediately to San Francisco. The Judge, unused to being ordered about, refused and hung up.

The Judge had, he felt, given an example of good sportsmanship after his humiliating defeat over the building of the Marcalis home, which led to his decision to resign altogether from the Improvement Association. It had been hard for him to take so drastic a step, but if the community considered his views to be old-fashioned he had no option. It grieved him to feel that his opinions were no longer listened to, and it added to his gloom to hear growing praise of the Marcalis home and of the Greek's generosity to the village, as though his own position had been suddenly usurped. But he was determined not to be small-minded about it, and had gone out of his way to cross the street one morning to shake Marcalis by the hand when his large Cadillac drew up outside the Post Office, for no man would ever say of him that he was a bad loser. He had even gone to the lengths of telephoning to Marcalis one evening, when he heard that he was spending the night in the village, to invite him over to his house for a drink. The fact that Marcalis was unable to accept, did not matter: the point was that he had extended the Greek hospitality, and more a man could not do. He had also attended the opening of the Marcalis home, meeting there certain people of whom he disapproved, but acting, he hoped, with dignity. To find himself discarded by the community as its arbiter had hurt him more grievously than he allowed even his wife to know. But he still carried

his head high when walking through the village street.

And then, some weeks after the opening of Catherine Cottage, he received a letter from Marcalis, from New York, on his shipping company's expensive stationery, saying that he would be on the Coast on a certain date and would the Judge have lunch with him at the Fairmont Hotel? As the Judge would be in San Francisco that day on other business, he saw no reason to be small-minded, and wrote back accepting the invitation.

Louis Marcalis had greeted him graciously when he entered his luxurious suite that sunny noonday. A bottle of the Judge's favourite Bourbon stood on a tray and Marcalis invited him to help himself. They talked for a while of the charm of the city, admired through the windows the breathless view, the Judge pointing out landmarks with which he had long been familiar, and recounting how bravely the city had faced the earthquake havoc of 1906.

While he was extolling the virtues of his favourite city, waiters appeared silently in the room and began setting up a table for two.

"I always eat up here," Marcalis remarked casually. "I do not like to eat in crowded places."

"But," replied the Judge, giving his host a pawky glance, and thinking that he had caught him out, "I heard the other day you were seen dining here in the restaurant below with a young woman from our village—Mrs. Carson."

"That is quite true," Marcalis calmly replied. "She now works for me. But it would not be proper for me to entertain a married lady alone in my suite, Judge Prout." With the suspicion of a smile, he added, "Especially a young married lady from our village."

The Judge resented the word 'our', but he let that pass. In any case, his host was right. No self-respecting man would entertain a young woman in his private suite with his bedroom opening off the living-room and that sort of thing. He had to confess, as he drained his whisky, that Marcalis must have good qualities hidden under his sallow skin. It was with some reluctance, even so, that he came to that conclusion.

"But when I have any business to discuss," he heard Marcalis saying, "I prefer to be undisturbed."

The Judge turned to find that lunch was already served and that a waiter was hovering. A crackle of dollar bills for a tip, and they walked towards a small round table and were alone.

Over lunch, Marcalis took a second helping of caviar and turned to the Judge. "I admire you," he said, "because you are a fighter, Judge Prout. You have done your best to keep me out of your community, but I bear you no ill-will because of that. Now that I have learned to understand and appreciate your community, I, too, would fight to keep out anyone whom I considered to be undesirable." He spread more caviar on his toast. "I want you to know that I bear you no malice, but even respect you for your attitude. I am not a man people like. I am a misfit. But against your opposition I now own a house there, and for that I know you now bear me no malice, either."

The Judge cleared his throat. "You have, sir, been very generous to the village," he said, hedging.

Louis Marcalis shrugged. "What is generosity but a selfish pastime? Was it not the Lord who said it was easier to give than to receive?"

"What you've done still remains generous, sir," the Judge said, sticking to his point and reaching across the

table for the whisky. But if the damned fellow doesn't stop this smooth preamble, he thought, whatever he has to say will have an angle to it. So he fortified himself against any subtle onslaught by helping himself liberally from the bottle.

"There is another thing we have in common," Marcalis said, placing his knife tidily on to his plate and looking across at the side table. "We like to work. You work at your committees. I work at my business. The only difference between us is that you are not paid for your work on the committees. Shall we see what other things they have given us for lunch?"

They rose to their feet and looked at the appetising dishes. Returning to the table with choice food on their plates, Marcalis said, "I would like you, Judge, to join me in a new venture. It is my intention to spend more time on the Coast because I find the climate admirable. But I am a man who cannot be idle. I am therefore about to form a subsidiary company on the Coast and I would like you to become one of the officers of the company."

Ha!, thought the Judge, now we're coming to it! But he cleared his throat and said, "The only thing I know about ships, sir, are the ferry boats I used to travel on before they built the Golden Gate and Oakland bridges."

Louis Marcalis laid a hand on the Judge's arm. "It is not necessary to know about ships to become an officer of the company," he said. "I, who am the President, could not steer one across the bay. There are more important things than knowing how the engines work or how to use the radar. The important thing is to find cargoes for the ships and to operate them at a profit."

The Judge was thunderstruck at the suggestion. "I suppose you know, sir," he said, staring at his host,

"that the damned Communists have ruined San Francisco as a port?"

"That, Judge, is why I have decided to form a company here—to bring back, if I can, some of its old prosperity. There are too many ships today avoiding this port because of its labour troubles. I want to alter that, if I can."

"A costly experiment," the Judge muttered.

"But losses on a subsidiary can be charged against tax."

"And what part, sir, do you think *I* could play in this?"

"You," Marcalis replied, "are not only a respected citizen, but you love this part of the coast like a father loves his son. If you could bring back some of the old prosperity to the port you would consider that your duty."

"I would," the Judge had to agree.

And so it was that the name Homer Q. Prout appeared on the list of directors of the newly-formed *Marcalis Shipping, Inc., of California*, with offices in San Francisco. The salary that he received was an extremely handsome one compared to his emoluments for presiding over his court; but it was with regret that he asked to be relieved of those duties. The new work, he had to agree, was not unduly onerous: he attended meetings of the board, read legal documents, spoke his mind fearlessly and regarded the new work that he was doing to be the final monument to a career of public service, in a larger sphere. He was, in any case, as his wife had often reminded him, getting along in years and would have to retire from the court one of these days; and this new and unexpected outlet for his energies also permitted him more leisure to potter in the garden among his rose trees. He had

been a member of the Pacific Union Club in San Francisco for many years and he now spent his time there, before and after board meetings, chatting with old friends, with many of whom he had been to school; and through those who were merchants he was able to influence freight to the Marcalis Line. Judge Prout, for he was still so addressed, regarded this work as a crusade; and his many friends, seeing his zeal, applauded him. The Port of San Francisco must be returned to its erstwhile prosperity and any efforts in that direction must receive the city's fullest support. Judge Prout was indeed a man of public spirit, they said.

But, as the Judge himself was honest enough to admit, the decision to transfer his energies to the larger world of the city was in some measure due to the Improvement Association of Drakefall Point voting him down over the Marcalis house.

But he was not happy. He had finally agreed to join the Marcalis board after a long discussion with his wife; and the far larger income that he would enjoy was also taken into their considerations. It was against all his principles, the Judge had grunted from his rocking-chair on his return home after the lunch at the Fairmont Hotel, to be associated with a man that he did not like; but, as Maud Prout pointed out, few men in business like each other; they work together because they find it to their mutual advantage. It was silly, she said, to turn the Marcalis offer down because the man had womanly hands and a sallow skin and always had his finger-nails manicured. Was the Judge interested in helping to return the Port of San Francisco to its former glory—or wasn't he? That was the only thing to be decided, she said, knitting in her favourite armchair by the fireplace. And the Judge, being public-spirited, had to

agree that the project was indeed dear to his heart.

Once he had accepted the Marcalis proposal, considerable publicity ensued. The Judge's photograph appeared even in the San Francisco newspapers with a short survey of his life and background printed beneath—all of which was very flattering. *The High Valley Gazette* devoted a whole page to his appointment, tracing his life from boyhood to his present eminence. Marin County, they wrote, was proud of Homer Q. Prout, and they wished him well on his departure from the bench and applauded his public spirit in devoting years when other men would have sought retirement to the much-needed task of trying to resuscitate the shipping trade of San Francisco.

The Judge liked all this very much. But he still could not like Marcalis. In his life, the Judge had been the strong man upon whom others leaned; and the opinions that he expounded were accepted without argument. It had been galling to find that the Greek, whom he towered above in stature, was far more mentally adroit. Sometimes in argument across the board-room table it would seem that their physical statures were reversed. The Judge, in any case, knew only how to express his opinions with the utmost force, shouting his opponents down if necessary. And in every argument with Marcalis—who flew from New York to attend the meetings—he had come off a sorry second-best: and the other members of the board, while respecting the Judge's personal integrity, voted always with the President.

It is not easy for a man of the Judge's nature to find himself so frequently forming a minority of one; but he could not adopt the role of yes-man and he continued to speak his mind, even about young Mrs. Carson having to leave her child so frequently to spend what

he considered to be unnecessary time at the Fairmont Hotel, sometimes spending the night there if Marcalis preferred to dictate his more personal mail the following morning.

"Plenty of good stenographers in the city," he had said. "What do you want to bring her all this way for? She's got a child at home. Has to keep parking it. Besides, she doesn't come in here on the company's business."

"Which is the reason," Marcalis had quietly replied, "why your opinion has not been invited."

It was little remarks like these which upset him, remarks made without emphasis or anger, but which left him without the satisfaction of the final word. Marcalis's private life was, of course, his own: and if, as the Judge had recently heard from Ada Kingston, young Mrs. Carson was putting some of her earnings into insurance to provide her child with a college education in later years, her object in spending so much time in the city, when the shipping magnate was there, was understandable—for the Judge was sure that Marcalis would pay well for these extra services. Ada Kingston had also mentioned that Marcalis was delighted with the way that Mrs. Carson was taking care of the Drakefall Point house, and was very pleased to find that his daughter, Catherine, had taken such a liking to her. Ada Kingston had also informed him, her glance weighted with meaning, that Mrs. Marcalis was again in hospital. These little trifles he gleaned from his old-time neighbour, for the relations between Marcalis and the Judge were growing daily more strained and only matters of business, and those across the board-room table, were now discussed between them.

And then came the explosive issue which was to have such repercussions. The Judge considered a suggestion

of Marcalis to use bribery with a local politician, who was adjudicating the latest demands of a certain labour union, to be thoroughly dishonest, and he thumped the table in indignation. "The fact that a bribe may facilitate our problems is not the point," he thundered. "Bribery in high places—and lamentably in Washington, where the country's honour and prestige have been dragged through the gutter as each mink-coat or deep-freeze scandal has come to light—is now happily a thing of the past! We have by the grace of God, and the sanity of our people, elected a President to office whose pledge it is to remove all forms of corruption from public life! We have, I would remind you, gentlemen, a *Republican* Administration in power today—and, by God!" he said, thumping the table, "I'll be no party to any of the tricks those Democrats were up to!"

"We are discussing," Marcalis replied calmly, leaning back in his chair at the head of the table and speaking through a haze of cigarette smoke, "how we can maintain our fleet at hundred-per-cent efficiency. We are aware, in addition, that if the Port of San Francisco is again paralysed by a strike, hardships will fall on a great many people. It is, I think, Judge Prout, very important that we consider the position of San Francisco if yet another strike occurs. By bringing our freighters here, we have brought added revenue to the port; and it is my hope that many more shipping companies will be enticed to call here again, as they once used to do. As a man who loves this city, would you therefore sit by and see ships idle, men unemployed and cargoes rotting on the docks because there is no one to handle them, if there are other means for averting such a contingency at our disposal and at a trifling cost?"

The Judge looked angrily towards the head of the

table. "You invited me," he said, "to become an officer of your company in order to improve the shipping interests of our city. But if it is your intention to improve them by bribing cheap politicians, I can have no part of it."

Again he found himself out-voted. He left the meeting, when it ended, without a word to Marcalis, and curt goodnights to his fellow directors, and took a taxi to his club, where his ancient Packard was parked, and ordered a drink, sitting at a table in the corner because he wished to be alone.

As he drove home some time later in the gathering dusk, he composed the letter that he would write to Marcalis, remembering that the letter would have to be read officially to the board and that its language must have dignity and restraint.

On his return home he discussed the situation at length with his wife, who had expected him home earlier and was keeping the dinner warm, and she was in reluctant agreement. After dinner he went into his now defunct office, where so many of the community's problems had once been satisfactorily settled without a court appearance, and he drafted his letter of resignation.

It was in answer to this letter that Marcalis had telephoned on the evening of Libby's cocktail party. After the Judge had hung up, heatedly, he walked into the living-room and leaped over his wife's chair and kissed her cheek. Maud Prout then put aside her knitting, and she and the Judge sat until long past their usual bedtime discussing how they could now live upon the slender income from their savings.

Hilton and Virginia Sands drove back after Libby's party discussing amusingly, but not unkindly, some of

the odd characters they had met. When they reached their rented house, the children were in bed, and their nurse, Sybil Rayner—who had now become their housekeeper—was getting the supper ready. Hilton Sands, walking erect but with a slight limp, went into the house while his wife put the car into Emily's garage, for since losing a leg he had not driven a car.

He and Virginia had an unwritten rule after a cocktail party—which was to have another drink together when they returned home: not that the drink in itself was important, but after the noise and chatter they liked to sit quietly and talk for a while. So Sands made two martinis in the kitchen, for they were not yet properly unpacked, and brought them into Emily's drawing-room.

"How did we ever get into that party?" Virginia asked gaily as she entered and accepted her glass.

"Met the young woman in the Post Office this morning."

"Another fan?"

"On the contrary. She attacked me for what I said about Stevenson last week."

"You weren't *unduly* harsh, darling. Besides, you know you have a sneaking liking for him. You like any man who can use language, and you must admit that Adlai's a master." She adjusted the cushion in Emily's favourite armchair before sitting down. "So she started by attacking you?"

"Yes," he said, standing with his back to the fireplace and sipping from his glass. "She said I hit below the belt. I like people who're frank. So many women fawn. An attractive little thing, don't you think? Great poise."

"But how did she come to invite you?" Virginia asked, nestling into the chair.

"Said I'd meet too many people on the Bluff here

who'd agree with me, and it was time that I mingled with the masses."

"And you accepted?" She snapped her fingers. "Like that?"

He snapped his fingers, too. "Like that," he said, smiling down at her.

"Why?"

"To meet—the masses."

"Sounds bitchy, doesn't it, to laugh?"

"That, my dear, is the way she put it." He drained his martini, throwing back his head.

"Her child was sweet, handing round canapés to the guests with a little curtsy."

"A pretty child, I thought. Very like her mother."

"Who's obviously the belle here. Is there a husband?"

"I never thought to ask."

"Considering the time you spent with her in a corner," she said, sipping from her glass, "I thought she must be telling you her entire life history."

He laughed. "Strangely, we were talking about automobiles. She's just bought a new convertible and seems pretty pleased with it."

"But you could have taken the thing to pieces, darling, and put it together again—in *that* time."

Again he laughed. "We also talked about sailing. It seems she's quite an expert."

"And so you didn't continue your talk this morning about Adlai?"

"No," he said, "we left politics alone."

She glanced at him smilingly over the top of her glass. "Then she got you there under false pretences, darling. And I got cornered by that dreadful little schoolmaster and had to talk about education—and you know how badly I spell."

He smiled down at her. "I thought you weren't doing too badly with Jack Taylor."

"Who's he?"

"The man in the white tuxedo. All-American, 1904. A hell of a nice guy."

"Yes, he was sweet. So was the doctor."

"They say he's a good doctor, too."

"I've an idea we're going to like it up here."

"Virgi—I really think we are."

"Then fix me another martini, darling," she said, handing her glass. "You drank your last one so fast we couldn't drink together to your well-earned vacation. And I'd like to drink to that, darling," she said, putting her check up to be kissed.

After dinner that night Hilton Sands sat at Emily Prout's desk for many hours. He employed one of his secretaries, full-time, dealing with his ordinary fan mail; but if there were letters needing a more careful reply he dictated them himself. He placed his tape recorder on a table at his side and opened his brief-case, which contained the mail requiring his attention. It was better, he thought, to get rid of it tonight so that he could begin his vacation with a free mind. He would then go down to the Post Office in the morning and mail the sound-track to his office.

It was after 2 a.m. before he finished his dictation. He rose, stretching himself, and walked outside and stood on the lawn, breathing the cool night air. There was, he noticed through the trees, a light still burning in Judge Prout's house—a gentleman he had heard many of the guests speak about at the cocktail party. I wonder what keeps the old gentleman up so late, he thought, as he watched the light shining from the Judge's downstairs window. They told me he was an early bird.

II

CATHERINE MARCALIS WAS A SALLOW, pudgy girl of twenty who had acquired puppy fat a few years earlier and never lost it; and from the way she ate ice-cream and candy it appeared that she never would. She possessed the quiet, almost retiring, nature of her father, although, like her father, she had a will of her own. She had invited two friends from her sorority to spend part of the holidays with her because she preferred a threesome. If she invited only one girl, she might get tired of her. If she invited three girls, making a foursome, the four might form into pairs. But by inviting two girls, and making a threesome, she knew—as the young hostess, anyway—that she would be assured of attention: for, above all things, Catherine longed to be popular.

She was glad that her mother would be in the hospital while her friends were visiting. It had often been embarrassing when she invited friends to the house and her mother got 'stinko'. It was rather amusing when they themselves got a little 'stinko' on beer or sherry at their own parties, but it was a very different thing when mothers got that way. Besides, her mother was common, and she knew it; and when she got 'stinko' she became downright vulgar. Such things can become deeply hurtful if one is sensitive.

While Catherine loved her father, almost as a god, she also saw his failings. She knew that he had few friends, and she was sorry for him because of that. There were, of course, the hangers-on, the people who grovelled because he was wealthy, especially those making charitable requests or trying to get jobs for themselves,

or business. But she had never seen her father sit down quietly with a friend and play a game. Her parents gave large dinner parties in their Park Avenue apartment, to which many well-known people were invited; but they were oddly formal dinners and the guests left at the accepted hour with stiffly gracious good-byes. She had, when she thought about it, never heard her father make a joke.

Yet between them there was a deep love and mutual understanding. It seemed, sometimes, that her father could even read her thoughts when they sat together alone and silences fell between them: and he often confided his own thoughts, treating her as the son that he had always wanted, and sometimes speaking of his business. He had even confided that he had given a new church to the village so that, when her friends came to visit and heard about it, she could feel proud of him: and although the words were unspoken she knew that he was also thinking that when her friends returned to their parents and reported that her mother had been 'stinko', the fact that her father had given a church to the village might remove some of the stigma.

She wished, so fervently, that she possessed the qualities that he admired in women—beauty and femininity. She had started to paint because he was so fond of looking at beautiful things and was always collecting fine paintings. She had a certain gift, but everything in her life seemed immature. Yet painting seemed the only artistic flair that she possessed and, unknown to him, she was attempting a small portrait of him at the moment in oils; and she was using a small-framed photograph of him, which accompanied her everywhere, as her model. She hoped so much that it would prove good enough to show to him, and that he would be pleased.

She found herself thinking of her father so much these days, now that she was growing old enough to understand him. Before, he seemed cold and austere and they had little to say to each other. She was, as a child, rather frightened of him. But she was not frightened any more. They shared every secret. The only thing that she had not told him was that she sometimes drank a little beer and sherry; but as she did not like either, and only drank them so that her sorority would not think she was a prude, she did not feel any confession to be necessary. She had, in any case, the example of her mother to warn her, and so she drank iced water or Coca-Cola contentedly at her father's table.

A change had come over her father since he had built a house at Drakefall Point. He had grown more relaxed and at times even became expansive with other people. She wondered if it were the simple life that he found in his new house on the Bluff, when he slipped away from the cares of business with Harry Bicroff to cook for him, and spent idle hours lying in the sun. She had never seen her father relax like this before, and she was glad to see it. He was often gay when Mrs. Carson was around, and her father had always been stern and elusively forbidding with his employees. She liked the nice Mrs. Carson and had asked if she might call her Libby, for her father now called her by her given name, although at the moment he addressed her more formally as Elizabeth. Little things like that, recent little human touches in her father's approach to the outside world, were very pleasing to Catherine. He had even said that he would give Libby a season ticket for the Symphony Concerts in San Francisco when he heard that she was fond of music. It's good to see daddy getting more fun out of life, she thought.

The small sail-boat that her father had bought for her had not yet arrived, although a speed boat and a cabin cruiser already lay moored at Joe Murphy's wharf—the cabin cruiser being regarded as her father's boat should he ever wish to use it, when Joe Murphy would be at the wheel. Strict instructions had been given to Joe that Catherine was not to go out on the bay alone until she was thoroughly proficient in the handling of engined craft; but she could use the sail-boat, when it arrived, for she had been expertly trained in the handling of such craft during summer vacations in the East.

Since Catherine's arrival in Drakefall Point for the vacation she had been unable to receive the necessary instruction from Joe because his ulcer was giving trouble again and he was confined to his house. That her friends should arrive and she did not know even how to start the engines filled Catherine with panic, especially as she was a freshman at the University and one of her house guests was a sophomore. She thought then of Libby, to whom her father had given permission to use either of the boats at any time. So she telephoned to her, tracing her with the help of Tilly on the exchange to Miss Prout's house—which had been rented, so she heard, to the much talked-about Hilton Sands—and Libby, who was having a drink there, hearing of her predicament, agreed to pick her up in the car right away.

It seemed that there were few things that Libby could not handle. They took out the cabin cruiser first, gliding up the bay with sun dancing on the water, past the Yacht Club, resplendent in new white paint for the season, Libby pointing out landmarks on the way. The *Apollo* had a gleaming white hull and glistening chrome and a specially upholstered cabin which would allow

its owner to lie down in comfort and take a nap, should he choose. • Libby pointed out the channel to use at low tide, and how to steer a course home if a night were dark and visibility poor. • There was little that she did not know about navigating the bay; and she located various of the important houses on the Bluff as they returned, pointing out Catherine Cottage, too, tucked away among the wooded hills.

They next took out the speed boat, Catherine again taking a turn at the wheel, roaring up the bay, spray drenching them at moments, slowing their speed when they approached a sail-boat, then opening to full throttle when they were again in clear water. An hour later they returned to Joe Murphy's new pier, wet through from the spray, and Libby again showed her the moorings, and how to tie the boat up safely.

Seated in a dressing-gown of Libby's some time later while her wet clothes were being dried over the stove, Catherine was thoughtful. When she was brought a steaming cup of coffee, she looked up gratefully. "I'm so glad daddy likes you, too," she said.

III

LIBBY WAS RELIEVED to know that Tony was fishing far to the south off San Diego and would be away some weeks. Their liaison, embarked upon during the boredom of the winter months, had ended as far as she was concerned. It had ended, in her own mind, after a night when the smell of garlic on his breath, the rasp of an unshaven chin, and the aura of fish because he could not wait to take a shower before hurrying up the hill to

her house, had reduced him from someone lithe and rather beautiful into an untamed beast.

When last the fishing fleet came in she had left Drakefall Point the day before for San Francisco, leaving Melissa with Jack and Dorothy Taylor, and letting it be known that she was away on business for her chief. She booked a room at a quiet hotel on Powell Street and saw good movies and a play at the Curran Theatre, and lunched at the Clift Hotel and sometimes at *El Prado*: and she once dined at *Emilio's* and ordered without looking at the prices, and tipping lavishly. It was fun to be able to do these things without counting the cost, or spending worried moments afterwards. When the fishing fleet put out to sea again she returned to the village. But the problem of Tony remained still to be faced, and her own role in their short-lived affair continued to trouble her in her moments of quiet. Outwardly, she was the same carefree leader of the younger set, her telephone ringing constantly with invitations, her arrival each morning at the Post Office seeming to add gaiety to the village street.

Being now privy to Marcalis's affairs, Libby was deeply sorry for Judge Prout, and she made a point of speaking to him outside the Post Office one morning at mail time shortly after his explosive resignation from the shipping company. He had already been replaced on the bench and Judge Halliday now administered the local justice; and some approved of the change, for the new judge had already shown himself to be more lenient. But Libby had always respected Judge Prout. She liked his proud bearing, the way he walked down the street—an autocrat, but in Drakefall Point the grumpy old aristocrat. There had been no suggestion that anything had gone wrong with his world when they met, although he must have

sensed that Libby would know about it. He spoke of his rose trees, remarked upon the pleasant weather, grunted about the careless way that people were parking their cars and, doffing his hat, he entered the Post Office to be treated deferentially by Mark Featherbow. I think I'll talk to Louis about him, she thought. With no work to do, and a smaller income to live on, he must be finding life difficult.

Libby tried to hurry away that morning when she saw Brenda Ford approaching, but she was too late. Brenda, a young married woman whom the village had to bear with all the year, suffered from the worst form of verbal diarrhoea and the villagers hid round corners when they saw her coming. A young woman with large breasts and a loud voice, she stood before her unhappy victims, as though, to prevent their escape, her sturdy legs apart, and delivered a breathless flow of words in their direction as though she were addressing a public meeting.

"Read about your party in the *Gazette*. Why wasn't I asked?"

"Because," Libby replied wearily, for she had had such questions before, "there wasn't room."

"You found room for Hilton Sands and you only met him that morning."

It was no good arguing with Brenda. You could tell her to go to hell and she would be back next morning with a gleaming smile. So Libby said, "So I didn't invite you. So what?"

"Well, you might have. Never mind, I'll come to the next." She then began, without pause for breath, a story about an aunt in Bakersfield, to whom she was about to mail a letter, explaining that she wasn't an aunt really but she always called her auntie because she was older than she was and was really a second cousin

once removed. Taking another breath, she proceeded to explain that this aunt had just had her living-room done over and had to go to hospital to have her gall bladder removed before she had time to see how the living-room looked and would now have the cost of hospitalisation as well because she'd never taken out insurance and her husband, who worked for the Southern Pacific, was ill with ptomaine poisoning . . . Libby interrupted.

"Too bad, Brenda," she said: and, clutching Dorothy Taylor's arm as she came out from the Post Office, Libby escaped and crossed the road.

Jack Taylor, looking very nautical and good-looking in his yachting cap, was putting groceries in the car when they reached the parking lot behind Tom Allbright's store.

"Hi, Libby," he called.

"Hi."

"Think you could get Marcalis to give a cup for the big race?"

"I could ask him."

"Is he going to be here much this summer?"

"I think he'll spend quite a time on the Coast."

"Well, ask him, Libby, will you?"

"Sure."

Jack Taylor, having piled the groceries neatly on the back seat, reached for a small package that Dorothy was carrying and opened the car door for his wife to enter.

"Want to make this July the fourth a really big day," he said. "Wondered if we could get Hilton Sands to take over the mike."

"What mike?"

"I'm working up a few gags."

"Jack thinks the Yacht Club should play a larger part

this year," Dorothy explained, settling herself in the car.

"I think it should, too."

"Luke Fields doesn't agree."

"Then I expect someone's asked him for a donation."

Jack laughed. "You're right, Libby," he said, walking to the other side of the car and getting in. "We asked him if he'd pay for the hire of the loud-speaker equipment since he hasn't given a dime for any of the prizes, but that son-of-a-bitch even sneaked out of that one."

Libby smiled. "I expect Luke is even under-insured. It would be fun, wouldn't it, to set fire to his house one day."

"Especially," Jack answered with a chuckle, "if our fire engine behaved the way it did at our *last* fire! Well, ask Marcalis, will you?"

"Sure," Libby said, waving to them as they drove away.

The weather at Drakefall Point in summer is ideal. Sun beats down, but never unkindly; and only in July do you wake up in the morning to find your house shrouded for a while in a cool sea mist. By eleven o'clock the mist has cleared and the sky remains cloudless throughout the day, the sun making dappled shadows on the patios while a breeze makes gentle ripples on the beach, where the idle sunbather, swim or picnic, and children paddle and make happy noises and boats run gently ashore with flapping sails.

The beach is like a club, of which everyone had been a long-time member. Neighbours chat together on the crowded sand or lie outstretched and grow their suntans. They quieten their children when they cry; and fathers rise to their feet in swim-trunks to adjudicate in

quarrels with neighbour's children, apologising always for the behaviour of their own child, for there is a high standard of manners among them and a cheerful camaraderie. And if anyone should arrive on the beach without their lunch, there are always proffered sandwiches or cartons of milk.

The first appearance of Hilton and Virginia Sands on the beach caused many heads to turn in their direction. Hilton wore light blue jeans and a striped matelot jersey; Virginia wore a gay beach wrap which she discarded, disclosing an elegant figure and an exciting swim-suit; and their children ran off to plunge into the water, soon to become lost among the bobbing heads of the other swimmers.

When the Amazon-like figure of Brenda Ford, clad in a white swim-suit which was far too tight for her, rose from her own few yards of sand and walked brazenly across to make the acquaintance of the new arrivals, those who happened to be watching let out a small moan.

"That woman has the hide of an ox," Jim Purvis, one of the summer visitors, said to his wife, turning over on to his stomach and continuing to make patterns in the sand with a piece of broken shell. "Can't someone slap Brenda down? The guy's come here to relax. If Brenda gets her teeth into the guy, he may as well leave town."

Jim and Dora Purvis rented one of the smaller houses for a month each summer. They did not stand high in the social order with the summer visitors because they owned a small hardware store in Walnut Creek. But everyone agreed that although Jim was a rough diamond, his heart was in the right place; and they therefore accepted him as a regular little guy who would do anyone a good turn if he could.

Dora Purvis glanced across the beach, shading her eyes against the glare. Brenda was now talking to the new arrivals, her sturdy legs apart, seemingly immovable.

Jim glanced slyly again in her direction and chuckled. "I wish I had a slingshot with me."

Dora shooshed him quietly. "But I tell you what we'll do," she said, "let's go and break it up."

They rose to their feet, noticing that Mrs. Sands had left the group and had gone in swimming; and as they approached the few square yards of beach where the Sands family had tossed their towels, they heard words pouring from the lips of Brenda Ford.

"My name's Purvis," Jim said, ignoring Brenda and extending his hand. "Jim Purvis."

"My name's Sands."

"You needn't trouble to tell me that," Jim answered jovially. "Meet Mrs. Purvis. Hey, Brenda, someone was asking for you just now. Think it was Freda Kemp. She's over there," he said, pointing, "sitting with Nancy Battersbury."

"I want to see Freda," Brenda said, for Freda was a member of the Junior League in Piedmont and was therefore, to Brenda, a lion of a sort: but she did not like being parted so soon from someone she considered to be the greatest lion on the beach. Addressing Hilton, she said, "As I was saying, Mr. Sands, before we were interrupted, I'm sure your wife and I must have many things in common. So I'll be right back." She left them with a bright and eager smile.

"That dame," Jim Purvis said, as he watched Brenda's beefy bare legs stride across the beach, "if she ever gets her claws in, has the grip of a wrestler. The only thing to do is act like you're deaf. Boy, can *she* talk!"

"She does seem," Hilton Sands agreed, "to be a trifle voluble."

"Met many other of the folks up here yet?" Jim asked, as they settled themselves on the sand and lit cigarettes.

"Only those I met at Mrs. Carson's party."

"She asked us to drop by," Jim said, "but Mrs. Purvis was busy getting the house straight. Heard it was a good party. I don't think Libby ever gave one that wasn't."

"No," Hilton Sands agreed, "I can believe that."

"But she doesn't seem to find much time for the beach this summer," Dora said, "now she's working for Mr. Marcalis."

Sands inhaled his cigarette. "Is that what she does?"

"Yeah," Jim said, "landed herself a good meal ticket."

"Of course," Dora said, pulling up the front of her swim suit where it had slipped a little and hoping that Mr. Sands hadn't noticed, "I'm not sure it's good for Libby—all this gadding about."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, she spends a lot of time in San Francisco these days and she's flown to New York twice."

"What Mrs. Purvis means," Jim explained, wiping sweat from his face, "and what a lot of folks mean who feel the same way, is that she ain't giving the time she ought to her kid—see? No one can deny she ain't been a good mother. Thinks the world of Melissa, Libby does. But working for a guy like Marcalis don't leave a lot of free time. They say she has to be around whenever he's down here, and he's spending a lot of his time on the Coast these days."

"He has, so I hear," Sands said, "started a new company out here."

"Yeah—and doing all right."

"An extraordinary character, Marcalis," Sands mused, inhaling, his eyes searching among the bobbing heads in the water to locate his children. "Have you met him?"

"No; seen him, though. Nothing to look at. Don't suppose he weighs a hundred and twenty pounds. Thin. Sloping shoulders. Foreign-looking. Seems a lonely little guy."

"But very rich. . . ."

"Rich, all right, but you wouldn't think so to look at him. You'd pass him on the street and take no notice. Always neatly dressed, of course—but nothing fancy. In fact," he said, "Mrs. Purvis was only saying the other day that he reminded her of a friend of ours in Walnut Creek, a waiter, working at the Claremont. He's a foreigner, too," he added. "Armenian."

Dora Purvis was not sure that Jim's comparing Aldo with the great Marcalis was very tactful, and decided to change the conversation.

"I suppose," she said coyly, "you get tired of people telling you, Mr. Sands, that they tune in to you every day?"

"On the contrary," he said, smiling for the first time.

"Of course," she said, "Mr. Purvis and I don't always agree with you. We voted for Truman in 1948 and Stevenson this time. After all, it's our privilege to vote the way we feel, and as Mr. Purvis got his first real break under the Roosevelt Administration, we feel a kind of loyalty to the party."

"Of course."

"But that don't stop us listening to what *you* have to say. There's no man on the radio, to our way of thinking, who's easier to listen to, if you don't mind my saying

"In any case," Jim said, "we like to hear both sides of a question."

"Very wise," Sands commented.

"Aren't you going in swimming, Mr. Sands?"

"No, I never swim."

"Well, I think Mrs. Purvis and I will go in again," Jim said, rising to his feet and brushing loose sand from the seat of his swimming trunks. "We know Mrs. Sands by sight, so if we see her in the water we'll make ourselves acquainted."

"If you see my wife," Sands said, "you might tell her not to stay in there too long."

As soon as Mr. and Mrs. Purvis had threaded their way towards the water, Hilton Sands lay outstretched on the warm beach and placed the morning's newspaper over his face, for he wished to be undisturbed. Besides, these homely, but obviously warm-hearted, people had given him an idea.

IV

THE CELEBRATIONS OF JULY 4TH, when one hundred-and-seventy-seven years ago America had won her independence from the British, was the highlight of Drakefall Point's summer season. The day began with races for the children in the main street—egg-and-spoon, double-legged, sack, and ordinary races where children were grouped into ages so that there would be no unfair competition. After these noisy, though sometimes tearful, races had been run—prizes for which were bought by private subscription and which were later presented graciously by Ada Kingston, who sat at a long trestle

table outside Tom Allbright's store wearing a large flower-covered hat—there were races for the fathers, the mothers, and even for the grandparents, to growing enthusiasm and hilarity. Everything took place in the greatest good humour and Ma Wedekind did a roaring trade with popsicles, ice-cream and candy bars, and Kurt Grunther did a very fine trade in his saloon. It was generally agreed that the 1903 celebrations had begun well, for a microphone and portable loud-speaker had been rented for the day, which made marshalling the children before each race a more efficient method; and Hilton Sands had consented to take over, announcing the names of the winners, in addition, and making charmingly witty comments and asides, which delighted his audience.

Of all the national holidays, July 4th was also the gayest, visually. The Stars and Stripes flew from every flagpole in the village, or was draped from windows if people had no flagpole. Above Tom Allbright's store that morning Old Glory flew, a gay patch of colour against an azure sky. Even the weather, everyone had to agree, was being kind. When the Rev. Davidson took over the microphone at the end of the races, he expressed the village's grateful thanks to Mr. Sands; to Miss Kingston for consenting again to give away the prizes; to the number of generous people who had made the prizes possible; to the committee, and especially to Jack Taylor for his admirable work in helping to organise these events and for arranging for the hire of the loud-speaker. The Rev. Davidson, after applause, then reminded the village that there were other good things to look forward to during the day, enumerating them, and stating at what hour they would take place. There was then a slow exodus from the main street, many

invitations exchanged to drop by for drinks at a later hour, and before long the street was deserted as families took sandwiches to the beach or went back to their homes for a short interlude.

Catherine Marcalis was racing her Bear Class sail-boat that afternoon, which had finally arrived, and was in a state of tension, as she always was on such occasions. She had wanted to ask Libby to make up her crew, for she had seen her handle a sail-boat and was impressed and a little envious; but Janet Blore, one of her house guests, insisted upon sailing with her. So she and Janet arrived at the Yacht Club early to check up on the arrangements before driving to Joe's new jetty to board the *Firefly*.

Libby was in the club-house when they arrived, talking to Hilton Sands and to the Commodore, Jack Taylor, huddled together in a corner.

"Hi."

Libby turned. "The very person I want. Your father telephoned from New York at lunch-time. I told him we'd like to use the cabin cruiser this afternoon."

"Why, sure, Libby."

"We're pulling a gag. Have you met Mr. Sands?"

"No, I haven't yet," Catherine said and walked forward with an outstretched hand.

Catherine and Janet Blore were then let into the secret. Jack Taylor and Hilton Sands had arranged to hire a short-wave transmitter and it was their intention to have the big race followed and to relay a commentary back to the clubhouse: and when Catherine looked around she saw that men were already at work putting up a large aerial.

Catherine liked Mr. Sands immediately. He was very gracious and polite and took them over to see the aerial

and explained how everything would work. "At least, I hope it will work," he added with a slow smile. "It'll break the Commodore's heart if it doesn't."

"We want all this to be a surprise," Jack said with enthusiasm as he joined them. "That's why we're getting everything fixed before the crowd arrives."

"Who's doing the commentary—you or the Commodore?" Catherine asked.

"*Me* do the commentary when Hilt's around!" Jack Taylor said, pushing back his yachting cap. "Hell, no! We're going to make history in Drakefall Point today, young lady. In any case, I'm starter."

"But how," Catherine asked, turning to Sands, "can you speak from the boat?"

"Libby's just gone off with one of the men to fix things. It's a portable transmitter. Again I say," and he gave the same slow smile, "I hope it works."

"It better!" Jack said. "Let's go, Hilt, and check that everything's okay. Thanks a lot, Miss Marcalis."

Catherine and Janet Blore walked up to the notice-board to read again the starting times. She had entered for the big race, the one that she supposed Mr. Sands would be following. She hoped—how she hoped!—that she would win.

The Yacht Club and the beach were filled by early afternoon and some enthusiasts had driven over to the lighthouse to get a better view as the boats rounded the point: but the elderly élite of Drakefall Point sat in comfortable deck chairs on the verandah of the Yacht Club.

Hilton Sands, with Libby as his pilot, walked along Joe's new jetty shortly before the big race was to start and boarded the cabin cruiser *Abollo*, which was along-

side. Everything seemed to be okay, the radio technician said, as Libby scampered aboard.

"What's in that?" Libby asked, noticing that Sands was carrying an outsize dispatch-case.

"Dry martinis and a few sandwiches," he answered, climbing aboard with difficulty. "We are not obliged, of course, to eat the sandwiches."

Libby laughed. "Hilt, I like you more e'ëry minute."

"I would hate for either of us to ~~risk~~ this afternoon without taking the necessary precaution of warming ourselves—*inside*." He sat down in the stern and opened the brief-case and produced a thermos flask, which he placed carefully to one side.

"Are they iced?"

"I forgot to take the temperature, but they are as cold as any I ever fixed." He reached again into the brief-case and produced some sandwiches wrapped in wax paper and tossed them beside the thermos flask. He then produced a small cardboard box, from the inside of which, carefully wrapped in tissue paper, he produced two large stem glasses. "These," he said, "must be specially cherished. Martinis drunk from the lid of a thermos, Libby, taste like hell."

She took the glasses laughingly from him and entered the cabin. He remained behind and lit his pipe. He would like to do a good job this afternoon, but he knew little about sailing. Libby had promised to give him a few tips and he rose, lowering his head, and joined her in the cabin. She had already started the engines and was warming them up.

"Where's the list of competing boats?" he asked above the roar.

"In my pocket—back there."

Sands reached for a duffle-type coat and extracted a

folded typewritten sheet from the pocket, containing, as he found, the name and number of each yacht, its class, its owner and who was acting as skipper. He studied it, aware that they were moving.

"I'll take her down the bay and warm her up."

"Swallow job you've done," he remarked some moments later as she slowed down and made a sweeping turn.

She smiled over her shoulder, her short brown hair already tousled. "When you're working with experts," she said, "you must try to be—expert."

Sands put the list into his pocket. "I can handle this now," he said, "but I'll need you to prompt till I get my bearings."

Libby disengaged the gear and they slowed down, finally bobbing on the tide to the sound of muffled engines. She glanced at her wrist-watch before lighting a cigarette and shaded her eyes as she looked towards the distant Yacht Club. "We've got a little time, Hilt, before we move up. I'll run through the list with you."

He took the list from his pocket and they studied it together. "You want me to keep the Marcalis girl in the picture, don't you?" he asked, after being briefed.

"She's new here. It'd please her."

"Right. Any other things to remember?"

"Only," she said with a smile, "that this is a *fun* day and you're not talking this afternoon about the iniquities of the Democratic Party—for whom, incidentally, I cast my vote."

He smiled back at her and noticed the tiny mole high on her cheek, like a beauty patch, and her very even white teeth. Her mouth, he thought, was a little sensual.

"Let's make a check that everything's working," he said, moving with difficulty into the front seat beside

her and picking up the microphone and switching it on. "You watch and see if the flag moves. "Testing—one, two, three, four," he said into the mike, and waited.

Libby reached for the binoculars and adjusted the vision. "Do it again."

"Testing—one, two, three, four."

They waited. The flag on the roof of the Nacht Club finally moved a few yards down the pole, and then moved upwards again.

"That's okay," she said, laying the binoculars aside.

A stiffening breeze rippled the sun-capped waters. Ahead were small triangles of white canvas jockeying for position near the starting line. They waited to hear the starter's gun, bobbing on the tide. When the gun sounded, Libby engaged the gears and they began moving again. •

"We'll lay behind for a while, Hilt. Must be careful when we get among them not to make any wash."

"Expect you'd sooner be sailing today than doing this," he said, re-lighting his pipe.

"I chose the job," she said.

"You don't mind a pipe?"—he asked, opening the window at his side and tossing out the used match.

"I like men who smoke them. Cigarettes are such a nervous habit. Men who smoke pipes seem calmer and more reasonable."

"I can get mad as hell," he confessed.

"I like the smell of a pipe, too," she said. "And tweeds. A woman has smells of her own, depending on the perfume she can afford. But a man has his own natural smells—and most women like them. I think you might start introducing yourself as we pass the clubhouse. Give them a laugh to start them off."

He lifted the mike again from the small transmitter

and switched on. "This is Hilton Sands speaking," he said. "Mrs. Carson and I are following the race in the cabin cruiser you now see passing the club-house. I know little, I'm afraid, about sailing but I'll try, even so, to tell you what is happening when we get too far out for you to see. My commentary will not, I'm afraid, prove very nautical, for the only thing I know about a boat is that it is supposed to float. I hope, ladies and gentlemen, that my limited beliefs will not prove unfounded before this race is over." He put down the receiver and switched off.

"You can be a little more earthy than that, Hilt. You can even split infinitives."

He smiled. "Okay."

They were cruising at slow speed, hardly moving, but they had already reached the bad starters, who seemed in trouble finding the wind.

"Give them the names of the late starters—the *Heron*, the *Gadfly* and the *Hawk*. Tell them to keep an eye on the *Gadfly*, even so, for Mike's a darn good skipper."

Sands again switched on and relayed the news. The beach seemed especially crowded as they passed by—little black specks on the golden sand: and when he reached for the binoculars he saw that many of the standing figures were waving.

"Any special gag for the beach?"

"Will the loud-speakers there *really* work?"

"That was the idea."

Libby glanced over mischievously. "You could ask Brenda Ford to lower her voice a little so you can concentrate. But perhaps that's *too* rude, although she'd feel complimented to have her name mentioned. I'll think up some gags later."

Sands, to fill in a gap, then gave a commentary of

his own about how Drakefall Point looked to him from the cabin cruiser—the green wooded hills, the golden beach, the flashes of silver as the sun momentarily caught a car's wind-shield along the winding road ashore, the slithers of bronze as lithe figures walked about the beaches before plunging into the blue waters and the little daubs of red where the national flag was proudly flying. "Drakefall Point," he said, "which Mrs. Carson and I are about to leave for an hour or so as we follow the race and report to you, is cloaked at this moment in a halo of gold. There is one small fleecy cloud hovering in the sky over Point Reyes, as though it has lost its family and is waiting for someone to come and claim it. Odd, that, for I've seldom seen a cloud that size all by itself." And as Libby passed him a piece of paper with some hurriedly pencilled notes, he ended, "As I expect many of you can see, the *Grasshopper*, owned by George Kemp, is in the lead, skippered by the owner, with his daughter and Luke Fields as crew. The *Firefly*, skippered by Catherine Marcalis, with Janet Blore as crew, is moving up, though she still lies in fourth place." He then switched off.

"The shortest cut to the hearts of the people here is to say kind things about their favourite place," Libby said, opening the throttle a little more and weaving her way carefully to avoid making any wash. "They'll love what you said, Hilt. I liked it, too. Remind them shortly that Judge Prout will hand the Marcalis cup to the winner. I had a job getting him to do it, and had to drink two stiff glasses of his best Kentucky whisky before he agreed. The poor old boy feels he's pushed into the background—and that won't do at all."

Libby handed many notes to Hilton Sands during the course of the race; and as his facility for commenting

upon yachting affairs improved, he sometimes had his listeners on the beach, or seated in comfortable arm-chairs on the verandah of the Yacht Club where tea was being served, chuckling merrily. And when he said that from the cabin cruiser, *Apollo*, owned by Mr. Louis Marcakis, he was able to see through his binoculars that one of the crew aboard Mr. Kemp's *Grasshopper*, still in the lead, was Mr. Luke Fields wearing a yachting cap that he had borrowed from Mr. Reindeck at the garage, a great roar of delight went up, even within the sacred precincts of the Yacht Club. Jim Purvis, lying on the beach, rolled on to his stomach. "That guy's terrific," he said. "Ribbed every character in the place, but it never left no nasty taste. That guy's no stuffed shirt, Dora. I said he wasn't, didn't I?"

The cabin cruiser, *Apollo*, re-entered the bay two hours later, trailing George Kemp's *Grasshopper*, which was still in the lead, making the race a foregone conclusion. The *Firefly* had now fallen back to fifth place.

"Catherine hasn't done badly, though," Libby said as they entered less choppy waters, her hair windswept. "I'd have liked her to have won. It would have given her such a kick. You'd better keep up some sort of a commentary, Hilt, although there doesn't seem much more to say. Concentrate on the second and third boats."

"I think," Sands said, looking aft in the direction of the thermos flask, "that the time has come to start concentrating on—ourselves," and he rose to his feet, walking with difficulty, to return with the flask and the sandwiches. "Where did you put the glasses?"

Libby took one hand from the wheel and opened a locker. "In here."

Sands, seated beside her again, steadied the wheel when Libby let go to open the packet of sandwiches.

"Keep up some sort of a commentary, Hilt," she said, a moment later.

"I never speak with my mouth full."

She liked the way he smiled. He lifted the mike again, as she had asked him to do, and gave them a description of the bay with the sun now casting longer shadows across the hills. He remembered the small cloud that he had spoken of when starting and he said that its family now seemed to have located it—for the sky over Point Reyes was now filled with other clouds scurrying towards it—larger clouds, fathers, mothers, grandfathers. It would seem, he said, that the weather had put on its best behaviour for the fourth, but he wouldn't like to bet on tomorrow's weather.

He then laid the mike aside and wiped spray from his face before filling their glasses. "Slow down a bit," he said. "Salt water doesn't add anything to a martini."

She throttled the engines down, closed the cabin window and wiped spray from her face. It was quiet now that the boat was slowing to a halt, and the cabin grew warm without the blustering wind. She stretched, feeling happy and exhilarated. They drank their first martini and he refilled their glasses. They then sat chatting idly, munching their sandwiches and sipping from their glasses—ahead, around and behind them white triangles of sail. When he spilled a little of the martini on to his leg while pouring, she mopped it with her handkerchief. It had been a shock to her to find that his knee-cap, as she rubbed, was cold and bloodless. Yet the discovery that one of his legs was made of aluminium did not repulse her, as it might have done with other men.

"So you know about Jeremiah?"

"Jeremiah?"

"My leg," he smiled.

"Does it bother you much?" she asked, as casually as she could, for she felt suddenly compassionate about it.

"It could—if I let it."

"Was it the war?"

"No; an automobile. I turned it over in a ditch."

"Going fast?"

He started to refill his own glass. "About eighty."

"I'm so sorry," she said, and thought how lame that sounded. She watched his face in profile, deciding that he reminded her a little of Jerd. She supposed that it was the breeding in both their faces. But Hilton was more fun to be with. He looked almost boyish as he concentrated on pouring the last dregs from the thermos into his own glass, his fair hair tousled from the wind. She watched him place the thermos aside and noticed his hands with their long delicate fingers. She watched him put the glass to his lips and decided that his mouth wasn't as strong as Jerd's, but she liked the strength of his chin. His face, as she studied it more closely, was far more sensitive than Jerd's and rather beautiful, especially in profile. She lay back against the cushion of her seat, aware that the third martini was going to her head. When he picked up the mike to make a hurried comment about a near collision between the *Gadfly* and the *Hawk*, she reached out involuntarily and found her hand in his. "You're so darling," she said, "to take all this so seriously."

The next few moments were never clear in Hilton's mind. He had been aware of his companion at the wheel in a rather abstract way, noticing at times the soft outline of her breasts beneath her cashmere sweater. He

had noticed, and liked, her enthusiasm and vitality and her sense of fun. He had liked tremendously her efficiency. But when he found her hand in his and he turned to her in the quiet of the cabin, there seemed a new excitement in her eyes. Her mouth seemed warm and waiting when he took her into his arms. It was, he agreed afterwards, a moment of sheer madness, for boats were sailing by at the time, although the eyes of their crews would be on the finishing line. True, the martinis had been drunk with unusual haste, but that was their mood—this was July 4th, a fun day, a day one did not count one's drinks. But the initial moment of madness when Libby's lips opened wider and her lithe little body turned and pressed against his, as though offering complete surrender, was a moment it would take him a long time to forget: for Sands, since his marriage to Virginia—aided by determination to have no breath of scandal touch him—had conducted his life immaculately. But as Libby clung to him breathlessly, almost desperately, he found himself taking new liberties with her soft, warm body.

"Don't, darling—please don't! Oh, *pleast* don't!"

Her cry was urgent, but their mouths met again, hungrily, fiercely, and all resistance ceased.

Some four hours later, when Libby entered the Yacht Club on the arm of Mark Featherbow, who had claimed her for his partner for the July 4th dance as far back as last January, she wondered how the evening could be endured: for, after this afternoon, she knew that no man would matter in her life again. She was in love with Hilton, seriously in love—which would, in itself, be an enormous complication.

Hilton Sands, at the same hour, seated in Emily Prout's drawing-room while Virginia wrote some

letters, wondered, with some vexation, how, after this afternoon, he could broach the subject to Libby of Marcalis buying control of a radio station and placing him at its head—an ambitious project that he had conceived on the beach some weeks earlier. But this thought, though recurring, was dwarfed beside his memories of the afternoon, for he was more emotionally disturbed than he had ever been; and he knew, unless he were strong enough, that a very big decision would have to be faced.

What neither of them knew was that Hilton Sands had forgotten to switch the microphone off while the *Apollo* lay tossing idly at the entrance to the bay.

V

WHEN THE BOATS RE-ENTERED THE BAY ON JULY 4TH, many people ceased to listen to the commentary, for they were at the water's edge watching and cheering the finish of the race. But there were some who did continue to listen, straining their ears at moments, deeply puzzled.

Mark Featherbow had had his ear close to one of the loud-speakers throughout the race, hoping to hear Libby's voice at moments butting into the commentary—and, in that respect, his wish had been gratified. As he walked gloomily home, he did not know what to think. By the time he had eaten a heavy supper to make a solid lining to his stomach—for there would be plenty of drinking at the dance—his unhappy mind was made up: he would say nothing to Libby, acting as though he did not know what had occurred. If he raised

the subject, it could only lead to argument, and perhaps a quarrel. That would lead nowhere; nor could it undo what had been done. The main purpose in his life, taking the long view, was to remain in Libby's good graces. This was a moment, he decided, when he must act above his own inclinations, hiding his anger and resentment. Besides, Libby would have to live this down in the community, and it might be tough going. When, later that night, some of the dancers looked at her askance while they were waltzing together, Mark Featherbow decided to give a poke in the nose to anyone who said anything to the detriment of his lovely partner. He was going to stand staunchly beside her in the oncoming crisis, thereby perhaps winning her in the end.

Nancy Battersbury, who had come to the dance unescorted and was in bad humour because she had found herself so often partnerless, smoked through her long green holder. "It doesn't *surprise* me," was her comment to anyone who spoke to her about the incident, looking primly pained. "But I'm not going to allow *my* child to play with Melissa any more, with a mother like that." She then sauntered away, trying to look well-bred.

Brenda Ford had a different approach. Hers was to ask the same question of everyone she met at the dance. "You don't believe this about Libby, *do* you?" If the person she had cornered had not already heard the scandal, Brenda obligingly gave them every detail.

Before long, most people on the Yacht Club dance floor that night had heard about the happenings aboard the *Apollo* that afternoon. Some of the young summer visitors shrugged and said, "Libby deserves a little fun, anyway." But the more prosaic talked to their husbands about it when they got home.

Jack Taylor listened to the story that Dorothy was telling him as he undressed, for he had been too busy at the end of the races to hear the last part of Hilton's broadcast. He put his white tuxedo thoughtfully on to a hanger while she was speaking and placed it tidily in the closet.

"Libby isn't that kind of a girl," he said, turning. He then walked into the bathroom and brushed his teeth.

Jim Purvis loosened his tie and unbuttoned the neckband of his shirt when he sat down on his return from the dance, and took off a shoe to ease the pressure on a corn.

"So Libby has a fling with a guy who's married?" he said to his now nagging wife. "We had a fling, didn't we, when you was married to Gus Briggs? Did I point a finger of scorn—at *you*? Did you point a finger of scorn at yourself? Come off your high horse, Dora, and make us a cup of coffee. This kinda talk gives me a pain in the ass."

Earl and Gloria Braithwaite were still listening to the commentary after the boats came into view on the homeward stretch, seated in comfort on the Yacht Club verandah, enjoying Hilton Sands in his amateur capacity: but when the commentary ceased so dramatically to have a nautical flavour, Gloria reached over and touched the doctor's arm. "This can't be true!"

The doctor looked from left to right. "Can't we switch the thing off?" he asked, troubled. But as he could do nothing, he talked as loudly as he could to the people around him.

That night on the return from the dance he also discussed the scandal which was now, apparently, rocking the community.

"Invite Libby over for a drink tomorrow," were his final words to Gloria. "She'll know then that she has some friends in the place, anyway." And Gloria, getting into bed beside her well-liked husband, wondered how some of the women who had taken such delight in Libby's predicament that night would care to have certain moments in their own lives made so cruelly public.

In case the scandal had not reached the ears of Ada Kingston, Norma Fields, Luke's wife, decided to pay an early visit to the Kingston house the next morning. She had been bitterly resentful of what Hilton Sands had said about her husband—and deeply hurt that people had laughed because Luke had borrowed a yachting cap from the garage proprietor instead of buying one for himself. It was most humiliating to find that her husband appeared to be the butt of the community for being careful with his money; and as Mrs. Carson must have prompted the joke—which she considered to be in the poorest taste—Norma decided to put as large a spoke as possible in Mrs. Carson's wheel, for she also resented the way that Ada Kingston was lately including her in her invitations.

But Ada Kingston treated the whole matter lightly. Not caring for Norma Fields (nor for Luke, either), she poured the coffee and said, "When I was Mrs. Carson's age, Norma, I flirted outrageously. It didn't do me any good, though," she added with a deep chuckle, "for I never got myself a husband. Yesterday was July the fourth," she said, with point, as she passed Norma a cup. "A lot of people do things on July the fourth, Norma, they don't do on other days. Now, what have you *really* come up to see me about?"

Virginia Sands heard the story from Brenda Ford. "Have you heard the *ridiculous* things they're saying about your husband and Libby?" she asked, gushingly, as she cornered Virginia outside the Post Office on the day after the races.

Virginia, not knowing what she was talking about, answered, "Of course I know," and smiled disarmingly. She made it her business, nevertheless, to discover what Brenda's insinuations had been about. Turning to Hilton in an off-guard moment on her return, she said:

"What goes on with you and Libby Carson that has the village in a tizzy?"

Hilton took a pipe from his mouth and tapped the ash into the grate. "I wouldn't know," he said, which at the time was true. "What are they saying?"

"I'm asking you. The Ford woman was agog with excitement."

"She usually appears to be."

"You can't give a clue?"

He continued to knock ash from his pipe. "I suppose it's considered immoral here for two people of opposite sex to go out together in a boat." He looked across at his wife. "Since when, though, Virgi, have you descended to village gossip?"

That remark stung a little.

"I'm merely amused to know what people are saying."

"Then if you're so interested," he said, "why don't you go and find out." He then left the room.

Virginia made a point of dropping by at Mrs. Ford's bungalow that evening, where she was offered a glass of Gallo sherry while the buxom young wife of Bert Ford, who worked for the Telephone Company in San Rafael, was preparing the children's supper. There had been many rumours and manufactured scandals since Hilton

had climbed into his own small corner of the public limelight, and Virginia kept a book of cuttings into which she pasted any untruths that were written about him, and printed the word *Lies* on the cover in bold strokes. It had been fun to trace the origin of each—usually to jealousies or intrigues, though sometimes to genuine mistakes. As Hilton resembled in appearance a certain Hollywood film star, it had sometimes been erroneously reported in gossip columns that he had been seen dining with a lovely companion at a shaded table in the corner of a well-known San Francisco restaurant, when he had been, in fact, sleeping peacefully in their double-bed in Burlingame. It would be fun to pin down this latest story, and Virginia was quite sure that the garrulous Mrs. Ford would spill the beans.

Which, of course, Brenda Ford did.

Ma Wedekind did not hear the commentary, for she was busy behind her counter; but the news was relayed to her within a very short space of time. She had never liked Libby, regarding her, in any case, as a new arrival: and Libby, she always felt, did not really care for Drakefall Point and would move on when it suited her to do so. Ma was, furthermore, the confidante of Libby's affair with Tony; and although she liked Tony to have a little fun, she, being a woman, exonerated him from any blame, placing the whole onus upon Libby, whom she considered, in any case, to be giving Tony ideas above his station in life.

Ma Wedekind had received a letter from Tony that day, and she laid it flat on the counter and read it again, appalled at his bad spelling. The fishing had been good; he wrote in pencil, and he hoped to be home by the end of the month. He was thinking, he said, of taking her

advice about settling down. *Tell Libby when you see her that I've all ready bought a ring. She won't let me rite to her, as you know, but after this trip everything is going to be honkydory.*

There's going to be some fireworks around here soon, Ma Wedekind thought, as she replaced Tony's letter back into its envelope.

Al Reindeck, who had assisted the radio men to set up their aerial and loud-speaker on the beach, was another who had heard the commentary in its entirety, although the last part, he had to agree, was blurred and full of static. He had heard enough, though, to cause him food for thought and he went about his busy day at the gas station with a solemn countenance and was abrupt of manner.

Tom Allbright had not heard the end of the commentary, but its content had been relayed to him later across the counter of his store, "Young Libby," he said, forcing a chuckle, "is getting high-stepping," for Tom knew that it was bad for business to be heard criticising a customer in public; and until he knew how all this might affect Libby's position with the powerful Marcalis, he was going to express no opinion.

The news reached Louis Marcalis through a devious route. Harry Prestwick—a July 4th house guest of Judge Prout's—was a close friend of Joseph P. Norberg, one of the Judge's late co-directors on the Marcalis board. The board, while agreeing that the president's new housekeeper-secretary was a young woman of undoubted charm, did not like the way she appeared to be ruling his life. No small body of men, grouped together on important business, like to have their dis-

cussions interrupted by telephone calls on trivial domestic affairs. But Louis Marcalis, to whom work was usually a consuming passion, allowed any telephone calls from Mrs. Carson to interrupt their meetings—which conversations appeared sometimes to be of a prolonged and irrelevant nature.

So when Harry Prestwick, from the verandah of the Yacht Club, heard the last garbled moments of Hilton's commentary—which the Judge, owing to increasing deafness, was unable to hear—he decided, when lunching with Joseph P. Norberg at 'Jack's' in San Francisco next day, to relay this choice piece of gossip. Joseph P. Norberg told his wife on his return home; and Eleanor Norberg relayed the news with relish to her nearest neighbour. "A running commentary by Hilton Sands while he necks a dame on a boat! Can you tie *that* one!"

The friend relayed the story to someone who knew Barney Balchin, who wrote a much-read column in the San Francisco *Star*. Barney, hitting the typewriter keys with wariness, for he still had a few law cases on his hands, made the most of the information, even so. *Did a high-minded commentator from Station KTV (happily married we've been constantly told) know that the mike was still live when he began making love to the beautiful social secretary of a shipping mogul in the middle of doing a commentary on the yacht races up the Marin coast July 4th? Or was it love that made him so forgetful? Two faces today, I am told, are very red. My guess is they'll grow still redder before the dust settles on the Sands at Drakefall Point.*

The white-haired Joseph P. Norberg, feeling that he was doing a service to the president of the company, clipped this choice paragraph from the *Star* and sent it to Marcalis in New York in an envelope marked *Personal*.

The startling news reached Libby on the morning following the races, when Lulu Pereira arrived to do the cleaning. "Did the guy *really* lay you on the boat yesterday?" the toothless old Portuguese asked, her face beaming. "Boy—did it sound like you was having a good time!"

VI

WHEN VIRGINIA SANDS paid her evening visit to Brenda Ford, who so readily enlightened her as to what her original innuendoes had implied, she made light of the matter—to Brenda's obvious disappointment—and brought the interview to a close as quickly as she could.

"Of course," Brenda said as she left, "this is not what *I'm* saying, Mrs. Sands. I'd be the last to say a word—and I wouldn't have told *you*, if you hadn't asked. As I keep explaining to people—what's it got to do with *us* anyway? Of course, I'm sure there's nothing to it and it will all blow over, but I must say Libby should have known better—but of course she never did know when to stop when it comes to men. But of course if there's anything I can do, Mrs. Sands . . ."

"You can, Mrs. Ford. You can keep your mouth more tightly shut than appears to be your custom. If there's any explaining to be done about my husband, *I* shall do it. Actually there is no explanation necessary—except this: my husband, under another name, writes light scripts for the radio in his spare time, as a form of relaxation. I usually read the female part through with him. but vesterdav Mrs. Carson read the part in his

latest script during a quiet period in the race. Good-night, Mrs. Ford."

That wasn't bad for the spur of the moment, Virginia thought as she entered her car, deciding to take a short drive while she cooled her anger. By the time she had parked the car her mind was made up. She would say nothing to Hilton. Not yet, anyway. After she played with the children, while Hilton listened to his substitute on the air, the housekeeper, Sybil Rayner, served the children's supper. Virginia and Hilton then had their drinks before dinner and played canasta afterwards. He did not act, Virginia thought, like a man weighed down with guilt, although his mind did not always appear to be concentrating on the game. But then, Hilton had never cared for canasta and only played because she liked the game. •

Hilton did not leave the house next day, refusing even to go to the beach. So Virginia sent Sybil Rayner to the beach with the children and she and Hilton spent the morning sunbathing together on the lawn; and Hilton read the newspapers and some special mail that his secretary had forwarded, while Virginia mended the children's clothes. There were no telephone calls, except from Judge Prout, who said that it was about time that he made Hilton's acquaintance, and how about dropping by for a drink that evening? But Hilton excused himself, inviting the Judge, instead, to drop by at his sister's house some other evening.

That Hilton did not go to the beach next day was, Virginia thought, quite understandable: he found walking on the loose sand difficult with his leg. Virginia, watching, realised that he had never been out of her sight since she heard the news, for she now sent Sybil Rayner down to the village for the mail and for the

newspapers. The only difference in their new routine was that Libby did not drop by each day, as she had been doing since the night of her cocktail party: but she had learned during her short visit with Mrs. Ford, that Libby was away from the village and was staying in San Francisco.

Then Barney Balchin's column appeared.

Virginia read it first, for Hilton disapproved of the Bay Area newspaper in which Barney's column was published, and was reading the leading article in the *New York Times*.

"You'd better read Barney's column this morning," Virginia said, handing the newspaper to him as she rose to her feet. "First paragraph."

She felt that it would be unfair to watch his face while he read it. Besides, he might flounder—and she didn't want him to flounder. Given time to himself he might find an acceptable answer, and she wanted such an answer. She loved him more, she realised as she walked into the house, than she had ever been aware. For does a wife assess, daily, the love that she feels? Married life can become commonplace, at times. It takes a crisis to show its value, and its meaning.

She returned to the lawn with a jug of martinis and two glasses. Hilton was still reading the newspaper: and as she returned to the house for the olives that she had forgotten, she glanced over his shoulder. The page was still opened at Barney's column.

"Hadn't we better deal with all this?" she asked as casually as she could on her return, pouring the drinks.

He tossed the newspaper aside and accepted his glass. "I'm not going to lie to you, Virgi," he said at last, "because I never have. What that cheap little columnist printed was true—and for that I must blame my own

stupidity." He looked into his glass. "But it still remains true, darling, and I couldn't be more sorry."

She sat with her own glass between her fingers.

"Hilton."

"Yes?"

"I see no point in discussing what can't be undone.' The only thing we have to discuss is—what we're going to do. You're aware, of course, that the whole village knows?"

"I am aware, after Barney's column this morning, that a great many people are going to know."

"Leaving myself out of this for the moment, this publicity isn't going to be exactly helpful, is it? I mean, to your work. The high-principled Hilton Sands has rather let his public down, don't you think? What sort of view do you think your sponsors are going to take?" •

Hilton ran a hand through his hair, looking tired suddenly, and Virginia noticed how the muscles above his jaw were stiffening and twitching. She felt maternally sorry for him at that moment, wanting to put her arms around him, to comfort him. Most husbands cheat a little and she was sure that this was the first occasion that Hilton ever had. How damnable that his first lapse should be so public! But there were matters that had to be discussed between them, now, and she must deal with them as calmly as she could. Hilton's largest sponsor was a man who would have no breath of scandal touch anyone who worked for him, and divorce, or even matrimonial troubles reported in the press, brought a working association to an abrupt conclusion. There were many things to be thought of now, and discussed as rationally as she was able.

"But apart from that, Hilton, what do you intend doing now—right now? It will be difficult, won't it, to stay on here after what's happened?"

He turned to her. "Do you expect me to run away?"

"It will be difficult—for all of us." She wondered if she should stress her own position, but she wanted to keep everything as impersonal as she could.

Hilton looked into his glass for a long time before answering.

"Virgi," he said, "I haven't been completely honest with you yet—and what I'm going to say is going to hurt. I wish I could save you this, but I've now had three days to think things over." He paused, and the muscles tautened again around his mouth. "I can't explain all this, Virgi," he said. "I can only tell you what happened. When I went out on that boat to do that commentary, Libby was, to me, just a person who was fun to have around the house. If there is any excuse for my behaviour, I can only tell you it was not premeditated. It was one of those things—that happen. I still don't know how it happened. But, Virgi, it *did* happen."

"Yes, Hilton?" she asked in the ensuing silence, her own martini still untouched.

"What is it, Virgi, that makes these things happen? I wish I knew. But I know now that the only thing I want . . ."

"Is Libby?" she asked, holding the glass more tightly.

"I hate to tell you this more than you know, but you and I can't go on living together unless you know this. I think of her every moment of the day. I think of her at night. Maybe if I'd fooled around, the impact wouldn't have knocked me for a loop. But I'm knocked for a loop, Virgi. I can't get her out of my mind. I've tried! I've really tried! But it's hopeless, Virgi—hopeless!"

She had never seen him lose control before. She waited a moment, and then spoke quietly.

"I quite understand," she said, hoping that she appeared calm. "There are women like Libby Carson who can do things like that to men. But the effects are seldom lasting, Hilton. The talkative Mrs. Ford tells me that there are many men in this village who feel as you do, who've been cast under the same spell. She appears to have the siren's touch, and no one can define that. Unless it's a facility for dangling sex, like a carrot, in front of a donkey's nose."

Again she saw the muscles twitch around her husband's mouth; but she was hitting a little harder now, for her own hurt was deep.

"And the only way, Hilton, to get women like that out of your system," she said, rising to her feet, "is to go to bed with them and find out how foolish it is to think they're any different from other women. I'm told it's rather a disillusioning experience and makes a man feel rather cheap."

That evening Virginia drove into San Francisco and caught a night plane to Seattle, telegraphing to her mother to say that she would be arriving—and leaving the children in Sybil Rayner's care. By deciding upon this dramatic course she was taking a gamble, and she knew it; but Hilton might come to his senses while she was away. It was so important that he should—so important for so many reasons.

VII

LIBBY LEFT DRAKEFALL POINT within an hour of hearing the news from Lulu Pereira. After pacing the floor for

some time, her mind was made up. She telephoned to Mark Featherbow at the Post Office to tell him that she had to go into San Francisco on some business for Mr. Marcalis and would be away some days: and she gave him the address of the small hotel on Powell Street at which she would be staying so that mail could be forwarded. She then arranged for Melissa to stay with Jack and Dorothy Taylor and drove hurriedly from the village.

She was not running away. She wanted to be alone, to think. Besides, if she remained in Drakefall Point she and Hilton would find ways of meeting. It would be impossible to think sanely then. This was a moment, in any case, when sanity was paramount. But it is difficult to think sanely when the mind is utterly confused.

As she drove, she searched her conscience. True, Hilton's arrival in the village had intrigued her, and she was determined to meet him—not because he was a well-known personality, but because she listened to him frequently on her radio and liked him, although not always agreeing with his views. He had one of the most beautiful voices she had ever listened to, and she enjoyed the intelligence of his mind. Perhaps she had been a little brazen in going up to him, without introduction, outside the Post Office on the first morning of the summer season and then inviting him to her cocktail party: but she would have met him during his stay and she saw no point in wasting time. In Drakefall Point, in any case, people were neighbourly and informal. Yet she had, as she looked back, rather forced herself upon Hilton and Virginia in the early stages, dropping by most days at Emily Prout's house on the slightest pretext. But she enjoyed both of them; they were a breath of life. They,

too, seemed to enjoy having her come over. What she wanted to be absolutely sure about was that never, at any time, had she a thought in her mind other than of wanting his friendship. She could say, with truth, that no other thought had entered her mind. That made things a little better, but not much.

She drove thoughtfully along the winding road through the redwoods and passed through the villages of Lagunitas and San Geronimo, driving slowly. She wondered if she should try to rent her house for the remainder of the summer season. But she had a job to do at the Marcalis home in Drakefall Point, for which she was well paid: and without that salary coming in each month she would be in financial straits again, for she now had her new car to pay for and other big bills to meet. So she could not leave the village. She was sure that Hilton would not leave, because of his last words to her before they left the cabin cruiser. Nothing, he had said, could keep them apart now, and she knew by the quiet vehemence of that statement that he meant what he said. True, that was before he knew that every word they had spoken had been relayed to the community; and each time that thought returned to her it seemed to hit with a harder blow until it stunned. She drove through Fairfax towards San Rafael.

When she came to Highway 101 and met the heavy traffic, she was trying to analyse her emotions. Was she in love with Hilton because he had the same qualities as Jerd? Jerd, she realised with a shock, must today be almost fifty. Ten years had passed since she had loved a man like this. Yet at the time that she was in love with Jerd she was emotionally immature and young so that she was dazzled by the life he offered. She was not dazzled any more. She had been through too much

during the last decade to have illusions. You do not, in any case, fall in love with a man merely because he has graciousness and breeding. Hilton, as a man, stood for everything that she admired and respected. After their final moments of intimacy before following the yachts down the bay, there was no longer any doubt. She loved him, desperately and completely. It was not just the excitement and passion of new-found love: she also loved him maternally, longing to take care of him in this moment of crisis—for crisis it was, for each of them. There was no doubt at all about her own emotions. This was no fleeting affair, unhappily. This was the first time in her life that she had really been in love, and something had to be done about it.

As she climbed the Waldo Grade some time later and topped the hill, the Golden Gate Bridge lay gracefully below and the city ahead was bathed in sunshine. There are few more beautiful cities in the world than San Francisco, especially the first view of it seen from a distance. Libby always looked forward to this view after a busy drive, but this morning she was unaware of it. Would the scandal affect Hilton in his career? That thought kept repeating in her brain. Could anything more cruel have happened to him than this? He held such a high reputation for integrity: now he would be reduced to the level of some cheap and predatory oaf. It was hideous, hideous!

After crossing the Golden Gate Bridge she turned into Lombard and kept up a steady twenty-five miles an hour to beat the traffic lights, something that she did automatically from long habit. She had, she realised, not thought of her own position since hearing the news. She expected that people like Brenda Ford and Nancy Battersbury were already rending her to pieces, but she

would take care of her own position in due time. The all-important matter of the moment was to sort out what she and Hilton were to do. By the time she arrived at her hotel on Powell Street she still had no plans.

She had no plans after staying aimlessly in San Francisco for three days. At night she lay in her hotel bedroom listening to the clanging of the cable cars and to the noises of the traffic, watching the neon lights outside blink through her window and make coloured patterns on the walls. There was no solution that her puzzled mind could find—except that she must never see Hilton again, alone. Only a superhuman effort of will had prevented her complete submission on board the cabin cruiser. When intimacies have reached the stage they already had, the dividing line is slender: for when two people find themselves in love there is no shyness, no hysteria. Love is an adult emotion and needs fulfilment. With each passing day she knew that it was not only her physical longing for him that so disturbed her: it was the growing realisation that she must never see him again.

Until a few days ago, Hilton was merely an attractive man with a slow and engaging smile, who made excellent martinis: and it was fun to call by at his house and spend time amusingly, with gay and sophisticated conversation. Now, suddenly, he had become her whole life. Were this some fleeting emotion, it would not matter. She would take him as her lover, as she had taken Tony, as a physical need. But this, tragically, was different because she was in love for the second time in her life. She couldn't face being hurt again, as she had been hurt by Jerd. To give everything to Hilton—as she longed so desperately to do—could only end in her being hurt again: for only marriage binds two people together until

the end of time. To meet furtively in order to satisfy their longings would be delirious. But love that must only be satisfied in secret cannot last. . . . It was better therefore to take a knife, now, and cut him from her heart before the hurt grew deeper. Besides, there were other issues to be considered, apart from her own.

Tossing in her bed, the noises outside her window quietening in the early hours, she realised, with alarm, that she could not continue to stay indefinitely at this hotel. She would soon have to return to Drakefall Point, where Hilton was still staying. To refuse to meet him on her return would add fuel to the scandal which would now be rocking the village—as though her refusal to meet him would be a confession of their guilt! They must continue to keep distance between them, somehow. She knew that if they met again, even in public, they would find some whispered meeting place. . . .

And then, as the first light of dawn crept through the slats in the venetian blinds, she remembered that Louis Marcalis had suggested in a recent telephone call that she come to New York—now that Catherine was at the house and could take care of things—to advise him on the redecoration of his Park Avenue apartment, a suggestion that had flattered her at the time, but which had been forgotten during the bewilderment of the last few days.

She was still awake when the noises outside her window were growing into the morning bustle of a busy city and the silver slats on the walls were turning to gold as the morning sunshine streamed through her window. She reached for the telephone beside her bed then, and rang for Room Service, asking only for coffee but adding, as an afterthought, would the bell-hop bring up any mail?

The first letter that she opened was one from Mark Featherbow. In his almost copper-plate handwriting Mark told her that Virginia Sands had flown to Seattle to visit her mother and would be away for an indefinite period. He also repeated the story that she and Hilton had been reading a radio script together on board the cabin cruiser, as invented by Virginia and sent on its rounds by Brenda Ford. *I thought you read your part very well*, Mark added. *If you can be as good as that, you ought to have no trouble in getting a job. It sounded real to me, when I heard it—which shows you must have more talent than some of the people I have to listen to on the radio. But I always knew you had more to you than most people.* In a postscript, Mark said that he was taking a half-day off on Thursday and would be coming into San Francisco, and he hoped there would be a chance of seeing her, and perhaps taking her to a movie.

Libby lay in bed with Mark's letter in her hand. She drank her coffee and read his letter again. The story of the radio script perplexed her, but she supposed that the excuse was Hilton's. It was an ingenious excuse, for many people in the village knew that she had tried to find work on radio before the arrival of Marcalis. If this were Hilton's excuse, she had better give it some thought. She supposed the obvious line to take was that she had asked if she might read a part aloud to him, hoping that he would use his influence to find her work. The story, she had to agree, was hard to believe under the circumstances, but *in extremis* one clutches at a straw. But it was soon the other news in Mark's letter that was occupying her mind as she lay in bed, listening to the noises outside her window grow busier.

If Virginia had left Drakefall Point, it showed that something sinister had already happened. Virginia

would not leave the village and the children in the middle of their vacation to visit her mother in Seattle for an indefinite period. As Mark always understated, the inclusion of those four words had their own significance. During the torment of the last few days, Libby had given no thought to Virginia. When things like this happen, dramatically and violently, one never seems to think of the other person, the one who will be hurt. Obviously, there had been a scene and Virginia had left. Who could blame her? How could she even face the village street? She wished that she hadn't done this to Virginia. She would give so much for it to be undone. But it couldn't be undone. It had happened.

She read Mark's letter again. What Mark had omitted to tell her was that anonymous letters were now being written to certain of the leading citizens of Drakefall Point, saying that they had a witch in their community who must be driven out. Everyone knew that Libby was the witch referred to; and everyone knew that the writer was Norma Fields, who had been suffering from religious mania for some time and was now becoming unbalanced. Mark, when sorting the mail in future, was going to toss any letters in Norma's ill-disguised handwriting into the ash-can, and to hell with Post Office regulations! These things, and others, Libby was to learn later. As she got out of bed and reached for a wrap, she thought, as she walked to the desk, how typical it was of Mark to show, by writing, that he was standing staunchly at her side. But as she sat down at the desk to answer his letter and dipped a pen into the ink, she thought how sad it was that so many of the really good men in this world can be so unbelievably dull.

She wrote Mark a gracious letter, accepting his invitation to go to the movies on Thursday, and would he call

for her at the hotel? She added a postscript suggesting that if he took her to a movie, she would like to take him to dinner afterwards to make it Dutch. As Mark had often expressed a wish to eat in the Redroom at the Cliff Hotel, that is where she would take him. She, then, sealed the letter down and lit another cigarette.

Some time later she opened her portable typewriter, without which she seldom travelled, and set it up. If Virginia was away, as Mark had said, a letter to Hilton should be safe. Mark would handle the letter in the Post Office tomorrow morning, but if—unlike the letter that he would be receiving—it arrived in a plain envelope and the address were typed, not even Mark would know that the contents came from her.

She finally wrote Hilton a brief few lines, suggesting that they dine together quietly and soon: but they must only meet across a restaurant table. She did not mention the reason for suggesting a brief meeting; but if she was alleged to have been reading a radio script with him, it was important that both of their stories should coincide. While thinking of a quiet and safe place for them to meet, she added that Thursday night would be no good for she was having dinner with Mark Featherbow. She thought of the Hamilton House in Fairfax, which would be a half-way journey for Hilton and herself: and she suggested that he should not telephone to her from the Drakefall Point exchange, and if he wrote instead, to mail the letter from Inverness or Point Reyes Station. She thought of these things for his own safety. Reading through what she had written, barren of all the things she longed to say, she signed the letter only with a simple "L", in case there should still be prying eyes.

Hilton Sands had stayed in the house on the day

following the races, expecting Libby to drop by as they had arranged. When she did not come, he became fretful. When she did not come the next day, he became worried. And then, after Barney Balchin's column appeared and he learnt that Libby had left the village, he, like Libby, began to pace the floor, though more laboriously.

On one occasion he lifted the telephone to ask Catherine Marcalis where Libby could be reached, but he thought better of it and hung up. And now, after Virginia's dramatic departure, he was still aimlessly filling in time, never leaving the house in case the telephone should ring. It rang on two occasions only. The first call came from the Judge; the other came from Ada Kingston, extending an invitation and asking did he like mint-juleps? The only person from the outside world that he had seen was the Judge, who dropped by uninvited and discoursed upon the world situation in the greatest gloom.

Until the arrival of Libby's letter, Hilton could settle down to nothing. He drafted letters that he would write to her when she had been located, then tore them up: and he drank more alcohol during this period than was his custom.

But to receive news of her and to know that they would be meeting, and alone, returned him to buoyant spirits and he answered her letter immediately.

There were complications, he realised, about mailing the letter, for he did not drive a car. Virginia, in any case, had taken the car, leaving it parked, he supposed, at the airport. He could not ask Sybil Rayner to mail the letter in the village, for the reason that Libby had suggested, and he had no means of driving over to Inverness or Point Reyes Station. So he telephoned to

the Judge, reminding him of his kind suggestion that he show him where they were drilling for oil near Olema—a project which, if successful, the Judge had grunted, would bring a lot of undesirable people to the area and end up by ruining the place. Hilton then asked the Judge to stop his car in Point Reyes Station, where his letter was posted.

Hilton was impressed enormously by Virginia's attitude and behaviour. He had always said that she had a man's mind. She never became emotional or indulged in feminine tantrums. Virginia delved into the fundamentals of an issue and faced them squarely. As he assessed his own role in this unexpected crisis he considered that he was facing the issue with equal honesty. He could have carried on an affair secretly with Libby; but he could not cheat on Virginia like that. Love cannot, in any case, be parcelled out like groceries and put together into the same bag. If he and Libby loved each other, Virginia had to know about it and the situation had to be faced. One could not live a continual lie.

He had, of course, had many women make feminine advances—even the wives, sometimes, of fairly intimate friends. But those advances, always graciously avoided, were usually at parties where too many drinks were served, moments that were forgotten next morning. What had happened between Libby and himself was something that could never be forgotten.

He read, and re-read, Libby's letter, finding each time a new and hidden meaning between the lines—her longing to see him, her desire to add nothing to the scandal that might affect her life or his. She wanted to meet him and discuss what they were to do, facing the position squarely and with equal honesty. *It is so*

important, she had typed, that we meet, for there are so many things to be decided. Above all I want you to know that I shall abide by any decision you make, for you are the one who matters in all this. But please let us meet soon, for the present situation is intolerable—and in so many ways—L.

After his visit to Olema with the Judge, Hilton read Libby's letter yet again, then walked to the telephone.

"Is there a car I can hire here?" he asked Tilly on the exchange board.

"Well, no—not exactly, Mr. Sands. At least, what time of day would you be requiring one?"

"In the evening. Tomorrow evening."

"Well, Mr. Reindeck sometimes obliges old customers if they're in a jam. I'm sure he'd lend you a car if you need one."

"No; I shall need someone to drive me."

"Well, I'll try Mr. Reindeck's number for you," she said.

VIII

THE THURSDAY NIGHTS IN THE SCHOOL-HOUSE when there was square dancing were especially gay in the summer, although a trifle warm. The summer visitors had introduced the year before the innovation of having folk-dancing, too, when many of the young women wore peasant dresses and danced to special music from the record player over which Ed Tracey, the village plumber, when not acting as Caller for the square dances, usually presided. Luke Fields found this form of entertainment light on his pocket and a good sweat to be good for his constitution, and was always a regular attendant.

Mark Featherbow was another regular attendant, although on the night in question he was in San Francisco taking Libby to the movies, as everyone present seemed to be aware. On this sultry Thursday evening in July, 1903, the usual crowd of permanent residents were in evidence—Nancy Battersbury, fully recovered from her operation; Jack and Dorothy Taylor; Al and Mabel Reindeck; the vet, Dr. Fletcher and his wife; the Rev. Davidson and his wife; Tilly, from the telephone exchange; Ben Truman and his wife; Gwynne Jones, the schoolmaster, and his wife; and Bert and Brenda Ford—she wearing a pseudo-peasant dress that she had sat up late making the night before in order to compete with the rich summer visitors. Dr. Earl Braithwaite and Gloria also put in an appearance for a little while.

The evening began as normally as any other Thursday night. Ed Tracey kept the phonograph at full volume, as he always did, and beat time with his hands and had a friendly word for everyone. And Ma Wedekind served the coffee and sandwiches during the long interval, assisted by Dorothy Taylor, whose car was used on those occasions to bring the refreshments up to the school-house. Catherine Marcalis and her house guests were among the dancers that evening, and Freda Kemp's Jugoslavian costume everyone agreed to be the prettiest in the room.

The first indication that all was not well was when Catherine Marcalis slapped Nancy Battersbury's face.

Catherine had not heard the commentary on July 4th, for she was busy at the time at the tiller of her boat, but she heard about it on the beach the next morning, where the happenings aboard her father's cabin cruiser appeared to be the chief topic of conversation. She had

been shocked, at first, to think that Libby would do a thing like that. Romance, in any form, had as yet not touched the life of Catherine Marcalis, who was acutely aware, in any case, of her ungainly shape. Certain young men had sometimes tried to flirt with her, but Catherine was aware also that she had a wealthy father, and, like her father, she was intuitive about people whose designs were monetary. And so romance had so far eluded her during these gentle years, but she thought a great deal about it, wondering if any man would ever want her for herself. She had at one time gone on a diet, giving up candy in the hope that the rolls of fat around her stomach and the clumsiness of her thighs might disappear. But her face, when she studied it intently in the mirror, had no attraction either. She was, she felt, an ugly duckling, and there was nothing that could be done to improve any part of her. She returned, then, to her candy, deciding to be popular with her friends instead, and to achieve a reputation as a 'regular' little person, generous and square-shooting. But she thought a great deal about the things that she was missing, especially when her friends like Janet Blore confided their romances and sometimes showed her the love letters that boys had written.

After her initial shock at hearing about Libby, wondering also what her father would say if he ever heard, Catherine decided, in the role she had set for herself as a 'regular' person, to defend Libby loyally. Besides, her admiration and affection for her were, she realised, rapidly becoming a substitute for her more normal emotions. The only other woman she had hero-worshipped like this was a rather beautiful young teacher at her private school, to whom, with the aid of the generous pocket-money that her father allowed her,

she sometimes sent flowers anonymously. But her childish crush on the school teacher was immature and undefined—so different from the way she felt about Libby. She envied the slimness of her body, her natural gaiety, the easy way she made friends. The way she felt about her, she realised, amounted almost to adoration. She was not going to stand by and have her abused.

Catherine had first spoken her mind on the day after the races, when all the beach was buzzing with excitement, reducing Nancy Battersbury to pulp—and she enjoyed her new-found strength. She argued with Nancy Battersbury, cross-examining her every sly statement. “How do you *know*?” she asked, loudly and contemptuously, when Nancy hinted that Libby was adept at having affairs with men. “Come on, Mrs. Battersbury, how do you know?” As an audience collected around them on the beach, Catherine pressed her points more vigorously and with growing enjoyment. “Come on, Mrs. Battersbury, how do you know? Were you ever present? Have you evidence to support that statement? I haven’t known Libby as long as you have, nor,” she added, with rising contempt, “have I had occasion to accept so many kindnesses from her as you have. But this I *do* know: *you* go around, like the Ford woman, taking away people’s reputations with a sanctimonious air like you’re trying to cleanse the community. But *you* know that if *you’d* had passes made to you on a boat by an attractive man and you thought no one was going to know, *you* wouldn’t have been so snooty about it, would you? Yet, the way you talk about Libby, she might have committed every sin in the book. Come on, Mrs. Battersbury, how do you know?”

“Well, I’ve known her longer than you have,” Nancy

answered in some confusion, picking up her towel.

"What *you* are is written all over you," Catherine called after her, contemptuously.

It was rather exciting, Catherine thought, as she watched Nancy, who was much older than herself, become lost among the half-clad figures standing or sitting on the beach. This is the first time I've ever attacked anyone, she thought, and I seem to have won. She decided, then and there, to continue this approach to life. Why should she sit back and not speak her mind, if she wanted to?

That incident on the beach on the day following the races was to mark a great change in the character of Catherine Marcalis. Although strong-willed, like her father, she had always suffered from shyness and reserve: but shyness went overboard that morning and in its place she developed a manner that was brusque and direct. Before returning to the house that morning, she and her house guests called at Tom Allbright's store. When Lloyd Saxby, who was employed as extra help during the season and was notorious for his bad manners, rudely pushed a case of Coca-Cola across the counter for the girls to carry out to the car themselves, Catherine looked at him hard. "Take that out to the car," she ordered. It was fun, Catherine thought as she drove up the hill, to stop being pushed around.

A few days later, another paragraph appeared in Barny Balchin's column. *We hear some tall tales in this game, Balchin wrote. Seems I was wrong about a pious radio personality from K.T.V. and a pretty dame making love on July 4th out in a cabin cruiser up the Marin coast when they cooed into a live mike. Seems the guy writes sexy love stories in his spare time and they were reading one of them aloud—in the middle of the races, buddy, out in a cabin cruiser where the guy's*

doing a commentary! . . . Well, whaddawe supposed to believe next? . . . Whichever way you look at it—meaning do you believe that screwball tale or don't you—sexy love stories don't seem to mix with highminded talk like that golden-voiced gent puts over. Gives the guy feet of clay in this reporter's view—or feet of Sand, if you like that better. The lovely social secretary of the shipping mogul at the receiving end of his attentions (initials L.C. but I'm giving no names) has, a little bird tells me, flown away with flapping wings and gone into hiding. If all that luvvy-duvvy stuff which so enthralled the worthy citizens of Drakefall Point was all contained in a radio script, what does she have to run away for? But trust little Barny to dish you the latest. The wife of Mr. Pious has also fled the village. Seems like she didn't like it, either.

Catherine and her house guests were lying outstretched on the beach, well-greased for their morning sun-tans, when Nancy Battersbury passed by.

“Read Balchin this morning?” Nancy asked.

Catherine turned over. “I never read Balchin,” she said.

“Well, Libby's in his column again. Might interest you to read it.” She passed on with a smile of victory.

That evening Catherine took her house guests over to the school-house for the square dancing.

She was flattered and pleased that the villagers greeted and welcomed her so warmly, but that was the way the people of Drakefall Point acted towards their accepted neighbours. The Rev. Davidson was especially kind, finding chairs for them to sit on until Dorothy Taylor arrived to give a short period of instruction in folk-dancing and everyone began practising. The medley of costumes—the blue jeans and the chequered shirts for the square dancers, and the embroidered blouses for the folk-dancers—made a gay note of colour in the

normally austere class-room. Catherine and her house guests were soon taking part, finding many of the young men eager to be their partners.

All went well until the interval for refreshments. Catherine was first aroused when she heard Mabel Reindeck telling an interested group around her how her husband had driven Hilton Sands into Fairfax two nights before.

"Of course," Catherine heard Mabel say at the buffet, "Al thought Mr. Sands only wanted driving over there. He didn't know he was expected to wait. But when Mr. Sands hands him five bucks to get himself some dinner, Al says okay—for no one likes to eat more than Al does and with five bucks he could do himself all right. Well, it was nearly midnight before Mr. Sands comes out, and here's the pay-off—when he comes out he has Libby with him."

Nancy Battersbury, who had joined the group, was the first to break the surprised silence.

"And where did they go *-then?*" she asked, with a supercilious smile that Catherine was itching to wipe off her face."

"Why, nowhere, Nancy," Mabel replied, turning to her. "Mr. Sands walks with Libby to her convertible, which was parked in a side street, and then he comes back to the car and Al drives him home."

"They'd only been having *dinner*," Catherine said icily to Nancy.

"I didn't suggest anything different."

"Yes, you did!"

Catherine then slapped Nancy resoundingly across the face.

At that moment Tony Florino, back unexpectedly from fishing, sauntered into the room and, liking a rough-

house, helped to separate the two young women.

The scandal that was to follow this undignified incident paled into insignificance when the people of Drakefall Point opened their newspapers the following morning. Mrs. Marcalis, they read under large headlines, had jumped to her death from the fifth-floor window of a New York hospital. Death had been instantaneous.

IX

THE TRAGIC NEWS was covered fully and sensationally in the *Star* and other newspapers during the next few days: and in Drakefall Point the shock was profound. The Judge, while he took the view that the wretched woman was better dead, sat down, even so, and wrote Marcalis a letter of condolence, as did Ada Kingston and many other people with houses on the Bluff. Until the public inquiry into the cause of death, many photographs of Mr. and Mrs. Marcalis—sometimes with their daughter Catherine—were to appear prominently in the press, both in the East and in California, where Marcalis was described as a great philanthropist.

The inquest was reported in due course, at which Marcalis was to give his evidence with dignity and restraint: but during the course of the proceedings the news became public that Gladys Marcalis had long been an alcoholic, which surprised and pained many of the inhabitants of Drakefall Point who were unaware of this unhappy fact. Many people, discussing the tragedy on the beach, wondered if Marcalis would now sell the house.

Catherine, distraught, left Drakefall Point for San Francisco as soon as the news was conveyed to her: and Libby, who drove out to collect her, took her later to the airport, where Catherine caught a plane for New York to be at her father's side. There was little that she and Libby could say. There is something about suicide which makes sympathy much harder to express, as though it were something that should not be mentioned. The tears that Catherine shed on her way to the airport were not for her mother; they were for her father. They were also tears of anger and of shame. Her mother had disgraced them so many times in private: now the disgrace was public and her parents' photographs dominated the front page of the morning newspapers; and the early editions of the evening papers contained pictures of the New York hospital with her mother's bedroom marked with a cross and a dotted line indicating her fall and an arrow pointing to the spot where her body was found. It was too horrible!

As Catherine sat in the plane some time later, she realised that she could not possibly have dealt with everything that hideous morning without Libby, who telephoned to her before she could read her newspaper, breaking the news as gently as she could, and driving out from San Francisco at once to collect her. She made the plane reservation; sent a telegram to her father's secretary in New York with the flight number so that Catherine could be met; sent telegrams to the parents of her house guests to say that they would be returning home; then drove them all back to San Francisco, first doing Catherine's packing. The thing that particularly touched Catherine was Libby's insistence, when they reached her hotel bedroom, that she telephone to her father, placing the call but leaving her to speak to him

alone when the call came through. There had never been anyone before who handled things so calmly, so efficiently, but with such true understanding. When Libby arrived at Drakefall Point that morning there had been no maudlin sentiment: she went straight to Catherine's room and took her into her arms, holding her tightly for a moment as though to give her courage. "You've got guts, Cathie," she said. "Thank God for that. Now tell me what you want packed, for we haven't much time."

As Catherine's plane flew higher into the clouds, she thought, with a strangely warm feeling inside, that no one in her life before had ever called her Cathie.

Tragedy has a way of passing people by, on holiday. The year before, a summer visitor was drowned and the body washed up on to the beach. The shock, first stark, soon passed. For a day people talked of little else; but soon the conversation resumed its normal flow. It was the same with the suicide of Gladys Marcalis. For a day or so the beach buzzed with the horror of it, and many walked by the house to peer over the wire fence at the curtained windows of the bedroom that the deceased had occupied on her rare visits to the village. But the gloom lasted only a little while. The permanent residents felt these things more keenly than the summer visitors, in any case. And as the carefree spirit of holiday returned to the beach, conversation again became more general and events nearer to home occupied their tongues.

Virginia Sands had not returned to Drakefall Point, and Hilton had also left the village. Some said that he had followed Libby into San Francisco and that the marriage had definitely broken up. Others said that, as

the Sands children were still at Emily Prout's house with the housekeeper, he—or she—must be returning.

But the continued absence of Libby gave edge to waspish tongues: and the scandal on July the fourth and its repercussions continued to be the chief topic of conversation.

Professor Garmichael expressed his opinions gently. Would it not be more charitable, he asked, to allow the incident to be forgotten? No one knew the rights or wrongs of the case for certain, but to give benefit to a doubt was a Christian act—with which view the Rev. Davidson heartily concurred.

Earl Braithwaite expressed his view more forcefully. Would a man with Hilton's knowledge of radio, he asked, forget to switch a mike off if he had ulterior motive? And would a man with Hilton's knowledge of the world be so stupid as to hire Al Reindeck to drive him over to Fairfax if he wanted his meeting with Libby to remain secret? And hadn't Virginia herself exploded the whole episode? While the majority agreed with Earl's views—which he sometimes expressed with vehemence—there were a few who could not find it in their hearts to agree with him.

The quarrel in the Post Office between Tony Florino and Mark Featherbow now had the village agog. Tony, arriving home to find that Libby was away in San Francisco, walked into the Post Office to ask Mark Featherbow for her address, knowing that he would have a forwarding one for mail. Mark, who cared little for Tony, refused to give it to him—a very correct and official attitude to adopt, he felt at the time, although his reasons were not wholly official. Mark assured him, even so, that any mail addressed to Mrs. Carson would be forwarded automatically. Tony then lost

his temper and called Mark a cheap son-of-a-bitch.

Mark took umbrage. The Post Office was government property, and he was the postmaster appointed by the Government of the United States. People who came in to conduct business with him would therefore do so with the civility and respect due to his position. He told Tony to cut out that kind of language—or 'get off the premises.

Tony did not like that kind of talk, either—and he said so heatedly. "It's guys like *me* who pay you your wages," he said, beating his chest. "Get that? It's out of the taxes *I* pay that you get the miserable few bucks they pay ya. You're nothing but a servant—see? *My* servant. And I tell you, Mark Featherbow, when I ask a servant a question I expect an answer—and quick. Where's Libby staying? I ain't got time to write. I gotta see her—and quick."

Mark, deciding that the letter of the law, according to his own interpretation of it, should be rigidly enforced, stubbed out his cigarette, realising that he should not really be smoking during the official hours of business. "See here, Mr. Florino," he began, using this method of address to add official weight to his words, "when a member of the public comes in here and gives a forwarding address, the address isn't given to *me*, it's given to the Post Office. And when it's given to the Post Office it isn't public property. If Mrs. Carson wanted you to have her forwarding address, she'd have seen you had it before she left. Now," he added, with solemn point, "having explained the position to you, Mr. Florino, perhaps you'll move on, because you're holding up other people."

"You can't do that to me!" Tony shouted, beating his chest again. "Libby's my fiancée—see? I gotta see

her. I gotta see her quick! We're going to get married—see? I heard this morning there's fish running and I gotta get out there. But we're getting married first—see? This ain't a matter for the goddam Post Office. It's a matter between a guy and his fiancée! You can't do this to me, Mark. We've always been friends, ain't we? I brought you fish the last time I was in, didn't I?" And as Tony turned to gain support from those standing in line behind him he saw cold, or amused, contempt written upon all the faces. He turned back to Mark, still beating his chest, but Mark was peering at the next person in line through the opening in the wall.

Before giving his attention to Brenda Ford, Mark had his final word. "If you mail a letter here, Mr. Florino," he said, "it will be forwarded. Now let me attend to other people."

Tony stood for a moment, then stormed from the Post Office. At the door, he turned. "I'll remember this, Mark Featherbow!" he shouted, and, pushing new arrivals aside, he hurried across the street to his ramshackle car.

The excitement this scene was to cause, as it was repeated and exaggerated on the beach, especially by Brenda Ford who had a ringside seat, again loosened tongues. Libby going to marry Tony Florino, the fisherman! The guy must have gone crazy! Some suggested, with a smirk, that there was seldom smoke without fire. Others thought that Libby could sue him for slander.

The news reached Ada Kingston, who consulted the Judge. Couldn't something be done to stop young Florino from saying such things? she asked. Young Florino had always been a source of trouble in the community and it was about time that he was taught a lesson.

"Can't do anything about it," said the Judge, "unless Mrs. Carson brings a complaint." But the Judge, who had on more than one occasion had to fine young Florino for contravening the fishing laws, was no longer on the bench: and he preferred, in the retirement that he now so deeply regretted, to express no legal opinions.

But he continued, without his usual fire, to express his opinions privately to Miss Kingston. The village, he said, seemed to have lost its good-neighbourliness. He did not wish again to mention the name of Louis Marcalis, but the change seemed to date from the moment of his arrival. Take Mrs. Carson—a young woman he respected, a fine mother until Marcalis came along—and again he apologised for mentioning the name. But what had Marcalis done? Dangled dollars before her, disrupting her life, paying the money and calling the tune so that she no longer had time to give to her child and was forced to leave her for long periods in the care of the Jack Taylors. He liked little of it. And talking of good-neighbourliness, look at the way the young Marcalis girl had acted at the square dancing! Slapped Mrs. Battersbury and started a rough-house. Nothing but a little thug! In the school-house where the young receive their early education! There was no good denying it, the village hadn't seemed the same since Marcalis came and built his house here. If he hadn't brought that damn cabin cruiser to the bay, there wouldn't have been all that publicity on July 4th. Even his wife had to jump out of a window and bring more publicity to the place!

While expressing his views, he did not rock to and fro in his chair as he once used to do: he sat quietly, a dead butt of a cigar between his gnarled fingers. Ada, watching him, thought how aged he had become since

leaving the bench. There seemed no fire in him any more.

The position of Mrs. Carson seemed especially to concern him. Apart from being a good mother, he said, she had been a good influence among the younger set since her arrival—always friendly, never petty. A young woman of charm and intelligence, even of culture. A type he'd like to see more of in the community. She was one of the few young women who had gone out of her way to run errands for him when his car broke down. She was always attentive, too, to his wife. But today the village seemed bitterly divided about her—those who had the intelligence to appreciate her, and the small-minded ones who were jealous and could find nothing bad enough to say. That dotty wife of Luke Fields was now writing anonymous letters about her, calling her a witch. A witch, if you please! Didn't that cantankerous, psalm-singing woman know that Mrs. Sands herself had put an end to silly talk about a flirtation between Mrs. Carson and Hilton Sands? Would a fine upstanding young fellow like that make advances to a lady—and in public? The idea was preposterous! Now that young scamp Florino was pouring ridicule upon her! Couldn't they leave Mrs. Carson alone? And when he reached this point in his monologue he returned to his favourite topic: in the old days, he said, before the damned Democrats got into power, young men like Florino knew their place. Now Florino had the effrontery to cast ridicule upon a lady—publicly in the Post Office! Maybe he *would* have a talk with young Florino, he decided after due consideration. A private talk.

Ada Kingston watched him walk down the drive later that evening, his long thin legs without their usual stride, an old Stetson hat on his head, a stout stick in his hand,

one elbow of his jacket growing threadbare. She watched him anxiously until he disappeared through the gate. Her old friend and neighbour was indeed ageing. His car had broken down again, she knew, and he was too proud to ask Al Reindeck to repair it-on credit: and the cheque that she had sent to him yesterday, with what she considered to be a very understanding letter, had been returned in the mail that morning. She closed the door slowly.

By the time the Judge had walked down into the village below he was too late to talk to young Florino. The police wagon had just been along and taken Tony off to the county jail in a strait jacket.

X

WHEN TONY FLORINO LEFT THE POST OFFICE on the morning of his encounter with Mark Featherbow, he drove home angrily to his father's house on the waterfront and sulked for a while. Realising that he was beaten, he got out some paper and wrote Libby a letter, telling her that he had now decided to marry her and that he had bought the ring. As his father could not afford to have a telephone, he asked Libby to telephone to him immediately she received his letter; and suggested that she contact him at Kurt Grunther's saloon, because the telephone at Ma Wedekind's was out of order. The letter would reach Libby first thing in the morning at wherever she was staying in San Francisco, and a call could be put through right away. He then sealed down the letter and walked with it to the Post Office and mailed it in the box outside, for he wasn't going to hand

it to Mark personally because he hadn't liked his attitude that morning and he wasn't going to ask any favours.

The next morning Tony walked into Kurt's saloon about nine o'clock; and as he couldn't very well sit around without ordering something, he started off with beer, and he took out his pen-knife and started to whittle a piece of wood. But his eye was constantly looking at the clock across on the wall. Libby should telephone by ten o'clock, at least. Anyhow, by eleven. So he went on whittling and talking to Kurt and ordering a can of beer when he felt like it.

By twelve o'clock he had had so many beers that he was growing argumentative, and Kurt told him he had better behave himself or stop drinking: but he wasn't going to have Kurt tell him what to do. When Buzzy Oakley, the biggest drinker in the neighbourhood, came in and took the stool beside him and suggested they shoot dice for drinks, Tony said okay. But he still had his eye on the clock.

Before long, and in still more aggressive mood, he was shooting dice for whiskies—a drink that he had never touched before, for he only drank wine, or beer if he went into a saloon. But he found the whisky warm as it went down his stomach and it seemed in tune with the excitement in his brain. By two o'clock he was drunk.

When Buzzy left the bar, Tony's head lay on the counter and he was snoring loudly. Kurt, whose liquor licence in the village had been obtained with the greatest difficulty, asked Buzzy to help carry his drunken customer into a room at the back in case Phil Parkinson, the deputy sheriff, happened to drop by, as he often did, to see that the bar was being conducted in a proper manner.

So they carried Tony's limp form out and laid him on an old sofa. .

It was nearly six o'clock when Tony awoke. The sofa had sagging springs and his back ached as painfully as his head. As his hands fumbled around they came upon the open pen-knife and the piece of wood he had been whittling into a boat. As semi-consciousness came to him he leapt up, startled.

He rushed, wild-eyed, into the bar. He glared at Kurt.

"What time is it?"

"If you can read the time," Kurt answered, pointing up at the clock on the wall, "you'll know."

"Been any telephone calls for me?"

"Nope," Kurt answered, fixing another customer's drink.

"There *has* been a call!"

"Well, there ain't," Kurt replied, taking another order.

Tony looked unsteadily at the clock, at which he had stared so frequently during the morning. It looked like two minutes to six. Two minutes to six, forcrisake! That wasn't possible! He'd been here since nine in the morning! He ran a hand angrily through his thick black hair and stared about him, confused, bewildered. It wasn't possible there'd been no call! It just wasn't possible! He continued to stand, swaying, trying to focus. It was easier to focus the bar than the clock. He could see someone behind the bar, who must be Kurt, and a long line of bottles on the shelf with different-coloured labels, and a mirror behind, like a sheet of silver, reflecting them. A sucker somewhere behind him was putting quarters into the slot machine like he'd gone crazy. A couple of guys were playing at the pin table.

Someone had put money in the juke box and music was playing. This was no way for Kurt to treat a customer who'd spent twelve bucks in the bar already!

"You lying son-of-a-bitch, there *has* been a call for me!"

Kurt ignored him and began serving drinks to some new arrivals. Heads turned in his direction. The music grew louder in his ears. He swept his tongue viciously over his dry lips and tasted the rancidness of his mouth. His heart was pounding. Was this a way to treat a guy who'd spent twelve bucks in the bar already! That lousy son-of-a-bitch thought he could ignore him, did he? Taking the half-whittled boat from his pocket he hurled it, missing Kurt's head by inches, but he heard the splintering of broken glass as he hurried through the door.

Outside, he stumbled drunkenly towards the Post Office. Mark Featherbow was locking up for the night.

"You double-crossing bastard, you never mailed my letter!" Tony cried, lurching towards him: and with the opened pen-knife still in his hand he drove it deep into the postmaster's back.

The Rev. Davidson borrowed Ada Kingston's Chevrolet and was at the San Rafael hospital at Mark Featherbow's bedside within moments of his admittance, kneeling in prayer. Police sat at his bedside to take a statement from the wounded man should he regain consciousness; but they left the parson alone in the room while he attended to Mark's soul.

XI

THE BEACH WAS SOON BUZZING WITH A NEW STORY. Louis Marcalis had engaged the leading attorney on the Coast, Patrick O'Donnell, to defend Florino at his trial. Some considered this to be a very public-spirited action on his part, and applauded it: others sought to find ulterior motive. Ma Wedekind, who had placed a box on her counter, labelled *For Tony's defence*, into which a little money had already been collected, felt herself to be cheated, for she knew that this must be Libby's doing. A man like O'Donnell might be able to prevent her affair with Tony from coming to light in cross-examination. But, faithful to her promise to Tony, she said nothing. She merely asked each customer that came in if they had put any money into the box, because it wasn't needed, now. Those who had given, shrugged. "Give the kids some candy with it," they said.

At no time in the living memory of Drakefall Point was the village surrounded with such a pall of gloom. People spoke in whispers as they waited for each new report from the hospital, and stood about. Everything in the village seemed to move at a slower tempo. While Mark in many ways had never been a good mixer, he was greatly respected: and the Post Office had been presided over by his family since it opened at the turn of the century. He was a fine citizen, Mark, upright and a good postmaster. He was their friend, playing his part stolidly in the community's life. No one said openly that he might die, for that was something that could not be mentioned. Instead, they sent flowers to the hospital: and Tilly, on the exchange-board, telephoned to Ada

Kingston and to the Judge as each new bulletin arrived; and Earl Braithwaite reported personally to them each evening on his return from the hospital. Mark's chances, he had said from the beginning, were slender.

There was no one sadder in the village than Ma Wedekind during those anxious days, forced to listen to the cruel things that were said about Tony over her counter. She had been across to Kurt Grunther's saloon—a place she vowed that she would never enter when the saloon opened—and had heard from Kurt, first-hand, what had happened before the stabbing. "The guy was drunk—see? Crazy drunk. Kept asking if there's been a telephone call. And of course there ain't been no telephone call. But the guy was drunk—see? Crazy drunk. Imagining things. Thought of ringing for the sheriff, but I didn't want no trouble. That's bad for business. So I take no notice and next thing I know the crazy guy is throwing things. Breaks four bottles of whisky and a plate-glass mirror. And if that ain't enough to lose in one evening, next thing I know is Al Reindeck's rushing in and asking for brandy to pour down Mark's throat."

People like Kurt Grunther are aliens here, Ma thought sadly, as she left the saloon, crude interlopers who don't belong in a community like this. She had, furthermore, learned nothing from him that she did not already know; for the village had heard that Tony was expecting a telephone call and that its non-arrival had finally set his Latin blood on fire. She had made application to see him in the county jail, and she knew that if there was one person to whom Tony would open his heart it would be to her. She had already received a letter from him to say that *Everything is going to be honkydory because Mr.*

Marcalis is going to have Patrick O'Donnell defend me, which is how the village first heard the news.

The rest of that tragic evening was also common knowledge. Dr. Braithwaite, located by Tilly playing canasta with the Kemps, was down at the Post Office as fast as his new car would drive him: and after seeing the seriousness of Mark's injury, he used Al Reindeck's telephone to call an ambulance; and assisted the deputy sheriff to restrain Florino, who was still so fighting mad that he had to be put into a strait jacket. Earl then kept the crowd back so that Mark could have air while they waited for the ambulance to come, and he drove beside the injured man to the hospital and operated upon him on-arrival.

There was one person in Drakefall Point who had expressed no strong opinions about any recent happening in the village. Gloria Braithwaite had little time for tittle-tattle. It was true that definite statements pro or con any subject of local controversy would be ill-advised, as from the doctor's wife: but Gloria was not interested in the small-town life around her. She was gracious to everyone, high or low, but intimate with few. A product of Baltimore, and far more intelligent than her fair good-looks would indicate, she led—when she could—a life of her own surrounded by books, her collection of favourite recorded music, a pleasant garden and her child. Above all there was her husband, for whom she successfully hid her boredom at having to live in this small community while he made enough money to retire. The only person among her contemporaries with whom she had anything in common was Libby, who lately seemed to be behaving rather foolishly.

Although Gloria Braithwaite took little interest in the gossip of the beach, she could not close her ears to it. She

had, furthermore, received a letter from Libby written from New York and obviously before she heard about poor Mark—which she decided not to show to Earl. Libby, giving only the scantiest of news, asked if Hilton and Virginia Sands had returned to Drakefall Point. *I feel so far away at the moment*, Libby had written, *and don't know half of what's going on. But I would like to know if Hilton and Virginia are back together.*

Back together? Then there really had been a break between them. . . .

Gloria had never cheated on Earl, even in thought. The idea itself would be repugnant because she was in love with Earl, and had been since they met ten years before. Many men had made passes since—some even in the staid village of Drakefall Point, but usually they were the summer visitors. These furtive advances did not move her even to anger. She had grown immune. She was in love with Earl and that's all there was to it. Being intelligent, she knew that she was attractive; and being wise she knew that she must expect these things. •

Gloria was no prude. She knew that Libby had slept with Hilton Sands, because the crazy girl had left her red convertible outside a motel in Santa Rosa, and it was the darndest luck that she and Earl should drive by early one morning in answer to a call from old Tom Kenton, who had had a stroke while visiting a niece. Earl, who had been up all night on a long confinement case, was too sleepy to drive; and Gloria insisted upon driving him over. Earl was snoozing beside her as they passed the motel. How silly of Libby to choose a red convertible and have it, by extra equipment, so easily recognisable.

She was not sure at the time that her surmise was correct: but Libby would not normally stop the night

at a motel so near to home and at one so off the beaten track. Had her car broken down, a telephone call and Al Reindeck would have been over to tow her home. The fact that the car was parked neatly outside the motel at seven-thirty in the morning showed that Libby must be staying there, but not necessarily with Hilton.

She decided, after Earl had seen his patient, to drive home by another route in case he might notice the car and make some comment. After all, what Libby chose to do was none of their affair; and if her surmise were correct she would prefer not to discuss it. Considering the matter further, with Earl still snoozing at her side, she remembered that Hilton did not drive a car. Virginia had told her that, after the accident some years before when his passenger was killed, Hilton vowed that he would never drive an automobile again. His leg, in any case, might make driving difficult. If, therefore, there were to be any sinful expeditions, Libby's car would obviously be used.

She did not blame Libby if the conclusion that she was rapidly coming to were correct. What right has anyone to blame what others do? Libby was a warm-hearted and attractive little person, spontaneous and with a mind that ticked. She had also been married; and it is difficult for any woman to change to a sexless life. But the thing that troubled her, as she drove, was whether it really *had* been Hilton. She and Earl had seen a great deal of the Sandeses since they came up for the summer: they both agreed that they were the most attractive couple ever to rent a house here, bringing **sophistication back** into both their lives. The four of them got along together beautifully. But her loyalty, suddenly divided, made her thoughtful. How damnable when these things happen to people that one likes! How difficult, too, if her

surmise were correct, for it is hard not to take sides and one can lose a friend in the process.

When they returned to Drakefall Point that morning, taking the longer route to avoid re-passing the motel, Gloria cooked Earl's breakfast while he took his shower. She wished that he wouldn't work so hard and that he sometimes would take a real vacation. Earl was dedicated to his work and his practice was growing too large for him to handle. His practice in High Valley alone was larger than any doctor's there. It was comforting to know that her husband's services were in such demand, but she wished that he would sometimes spare himself. Last night he had had no supper, existing on cups of black coffee while on the confinement case, so she decided to give him three fried eggs with his bacon and tossed another into the skillet.

Later that morning Gloria remembered Earl's suggestion that she try to locate the Sandses to see if they would be back in the village by next Sunday. If they would be, he had said before leaving on his round of visits, then invite them over for a barbecue supper. So Gloria telephoned to the Emily Prout house as soon as her morning chores were done.

Sybil Rayner replied that Virginia was still in Seattle, and Hilton, as far as she knew, was at their house in Burlingame. She knew nothing of their plans, Sybil said, but she gave Gloria the Burlingame telephone number.

From the house-cleaner who answered the telephone at Burlingame, Gloria learnt that Mr. Sands had been away from home for the night.

There was then no longer any doubt in Gloria's mind: Hilton had been staying with Libby in that quiet motel near Santa Rosa, and she decided that she had better continue to mind her own business.

When she finally replied to Libby's letter, she wrote first about the stabbing of poor Mark, giving her the latest bulletin. She then answered Libby's question about Hilton and Virginia. *They came back yesterday*, she wrote, *and invited us over for drinks*. Pausing, she wondered what to say next. After due consideration she wrote, *It was a gay evening, just the four of us, and Hilton—as though the evening were some form of celebration—served champagne*.

XII

MARK FEATHERBOW DIED ON A SUNDAY MORNING. His mother walked over to tell Tom Allbright as soon as she was sufficiently recovered from the shock of hearing the news over the telephone, bravely holding back her tears: and Tom, feeling that such news should be conveyed suitably to the community, sent his young nephew up to the church with a hastily written note. Geoff Allbright, who was helping his uncle in the store during his summer vacation in return for his keep and a little spending money, then got out his bicycle and pedalled up the hill.

The note was passed through the window to Dorothy Taylor at the organ while the lesson was being read, and reached the parson on his return from the lectern: and he immediately announced the solemn news and asked his congregation to kneel silently and pray for the soul of a much-loved citizen. His shocked listeners, many of the women already crying, then knelt: and after their moment of silent prayer the Rev. Davidson composed an impromptu prayer of his own, after which he decided to put aside his carefully prepared sermon for

the day and he devoted his time in the small pulpit to a eulogy of the departed, carefully avoiding mention of the cause of death. By the time the congregation filed sorrowfully out into the bright sunlight, many of the flags in the village were at half-mast.

The funeral in San Rafael four days later was attended by most adults from the village. The floral tributes, the Judge was glad to see, spoke eloquently of the respect in which their late postmaster was held. But he deeply deplored the new publicity that would follow for the village, for young Florino would now be arraigned on a capital charge.

The Judge spoke to Libby after the funeral as she was entering a car with Jack and Dorothy Taylor. Libby had flown back from New York the moment that she heard of Mark Featherbow's death. The Judge had noticed Libby's wreath—one of the largest—and the simple inscription on the card: *In ever grateful memory of a true and very loyal friend.* He liked the way that she had held her head high during the funeral service, ignoring the malicious glances from some of the mourners and the whispered asides when she entered the small chapel. "Fancy that woman daring to come!" Norma Fields in the pew in front of him whispered audibly, nudging her companion.

Libby again met with evil glances as she came out from the chapel and passed through the lagging groups that linger after funerals; and the Judge heard further unkind comments. To show the people of Drakefall Point how he felt about it, he moved forward to open the automobile door and doffed his hat. "I'm glad you were able to be here, Mrs. Carson," he said, in a voice that carried. "Mark thought a great deal of you—an opinion, madam, with which I heartily concur."

Raising his hat again to the ladies in the car, he glared at Mrs. Battersbury and her group before rejoining the group surrounding Ada Kingston on the chapel steps.

The Judge then drove with Ada Kingston into San Francisco to have a private talk with Patrick O'Donnell, an old friend of the Judge's, to urge upon him, if they could, that any form of sensationalism be omitted from the case when defending Tony Florino at the trial. Their local fisherman had drunk whisky for the first time in his life in celebration of a successful catch. It was a simple case of drunkenness, although it had ended with tragic results. The man who should be standing trial was the barman, Kurt Grunther, who served Tony liquor—and kept on serving it—although he saw that Florino was getting drunk.

While they were in San Francisco they intended to make another call to see if Kurt Grunther's liquor licence could not be rescinded.

But they did neither of these things upon arrival in San Francisco. Reaching the attorney's office they were informed that Mr. O'Donnell had telephoned to Drakefall Point to cancel their appointment, but they had already left. Tony Florino, they learned from Mr. O'Donnell's secretary, had hanged himself that morning in the county jail.

XIII

THE LIFE OF THE VILLAGE SLOWED to a standstill when news of Tony's suicide reach Drakefall Point. People collected in groups outside the Post Office, speaking in horrified whispers, then slowly dispersing in consternation. Why, each person asked—*why* had Tony done this?

Was he afraid to face his trial? Surely, as Judge Prout had assured them, Tony stood in no danger of the gas chamber at San Quentin. The real culprit was Kurt Grunther—and many stopped by to tell Kurt what they thought of him, and in no uncertain terms. One of Kurt's eyes was already blackened after Aldo Frascati a fisherman, had taken a slug at him across the counter.

That night, every window in Kurt's saloon was broken. Bricks had been kurl'd in the darkness, too, through Libby's windows.

The next morning there were headlines in the *Star*, with a photograph of Mark Featherbow, looking much younger in his war-time uniform of private, first-class. There was a photograph of Tony Florino in his war-time uniform of a seaman, and a picture of his fishing boat lying idly in the bay off Drakefall Point.

Judge Prout walked slowly down the hill that morning to say some words of comfort to Mario, buying a bottle of red wine on the way at Tom Allbright's store. He never thought that he would live to see the day when such things could happen to his village. But no one, in all the excitement, had been thinking of Mario, which is why he was walking down the hill. He supposed that he would have to join Mario in a glass of this cheap wine that he always drank. Why couldn't these Italians drink decent liquor, like whisky? But he continued on his way, the bottle under one arm, a stick in the other hand.

Ben Truman's truck drew up as the Judge reached the village street. The Judge, Ben said, was darn right to lay the blame on Kurt Grunther. That guy ought never to have been allowed to open a saloon here. He was just a cheap son-of-a-bitch. But it was terrible, he said, to think of what had happened. Two suicides and

a murder here, this season. Enough to give the place a bad name.

When he heard where the Judge was going, Ben offered to drive him there in the truck, but the Judge said that he would rather walk.

"I'm just on my way up to mend Mrs. Carson's windows," Ben explained before driving off. "Kurt's, as I told him, can wait."

The Judge walked doggedly along the waterfront, the bottle gripped tightly beneath his arm. They were throwing rocks through Mrs. Carson's windows now! Had the whole community gone mad? And what did young Florino have to commit suicide for? O'Donnell would have gotten him off with a light sentence! He was shaking with anger by the time he reached his destination.

There was only one person in Drakefall Point who knew the inside story of Tony's suicide. Ma Wedekind, seated behind her counter with the blinds drawn and a sign on the door which read *Closed*, sat reading Tony's letter, written two days before. *They told me this morning, ma, that Mark died. It's not that I'm now in more trouble that's got me down. I don't mind that, ma, if I've got it cumming. But I loved Mark like a brother. We played football didnt we as kids and we played baseball on the same team and Mrs. Featherbow allways asked me up to the house on my birthday and gave me a nice present. We wrote letters in the war, Mark and I did, and we made dates together when we came home on leave and I always kidded Mark along because he never had a woman and tried to get him to start but Mark said he'd never have no woman till he got married and now he's dead. I loved that guy, ma, like I'd love a brother. I allways brought him fish when I came home didnt I and once took him on a fishing trip for his summer vacation, only he got seasick. Would I want a guy*

like that to die? I loved him, ma, I keep telling you, like I tell all the guys here but they don't take no notice. I loved him—see? Now he's dead I see no sense in living—if I done it. But I don't remember that I done it, ma. I don't remember nothing till the sheriff hits me with something and I come to in the police waggon. I don't remember nothing I keep telling you, like I tell everyone, but I know you'll believe me, ma, and understand and not think I meant to do the guy harm. I was drunk—see? Christ, that whisky is strong. But if Mark had needed blood from me to help him along I'd have given him every drop in my boddy. I kept asking the guys here if he needed any blood but they never took no notice. That's the trouble here, ma, no one takes no notice and now Mark's dead and it seems I done it. I cried just now.

If anything happens to me, ma, I want you to do something for me. I don't own much but what I own would have gone to Libby, only I got drunk and we never got married, and now she'll never marry me after what I done to Mark. All I've got to leave her is the boat and I want you to see she gets it. My collection of phonograph records and the player I'd like you to have and things I've whittled which dad has in his shack. That's about all I have to leave. The things I shall miss are your spaghetti dinners. No one cooked spaghetti like you did. I'll allways remember the kind things you done for me, for you were like a mother. I wish I'd done better by you but all I ever did wrong was to poach. Most of the guys in here stole. I never stole, ma, did I?

Sincerely

Tony Florino

Ma Wedekind, her arms across the counter, buried her face.

XIV

LIBBY DID NOT HEAR THE NEWS OF TONY'S SUICIDE, so quickly. The Taylors drove her back from Mark's funeral, and she refused an invitation to have dinner with them. She wanted to be alone.

Her insomnia had begun in New York after receiving Gloria's letter with the news that Hilton had gone back to Virginia. It was right that he should go back to her; but that did not alter the fact that everything that mattered in her life went with him. For her own peace, she tried to erase the memory of their short-lived love affair from her mind: but her attempts ended only in sleeplessness.

Then came the news of Mark's death, and again she lay tossing in the darkness of her New York bedroom. But tears do not come so readily when one's throat is already choking.

Apart from the horror of Mark's death, she realised that Tony would now be charged with his murder! Soon she became haunted by visions of being ruthlessly cross-examined in a public court. She saw photographs of herself as she left the court on the front page of the *Star*—the kind of picture the reading public gloat over and expect. She saw visions of the case being discussed, as she herself had discussed such cases in the past. She saw men talking about her lightly in saloons, and women in the quiet of their living-rooms, or over garden fences as they hung out their laundry in the morning. She saw people like Ada Kingston, Judge Prout, Jack Taylor and Earl Braithwaite, shocked beyond belief. She saw the look of contempt in Hilton's eyes, a look of hurt too deep

to hide, which she could never explain to him now. She thought of Louis Marcalis.

She booked her plane reservations in New York so that she could attend Mark's funeral. It would have been easier to stay away and not face the ordeal, but if there was another world, Mark would be watching and waiting to see if she would come, and she would be there. In answer to the urgent, almost hysterical, letter that she had written to Gloria Braithwaite asking for the latest news about the quarrel on the morning of the stabbing, she now knew that Tony had shouted loudly across the Post Office that she was going to marry him, and she had since wondered, as she tossed to and fro at night, how much the village now knew or surmised. Returning to Drakefall Point was not going to be easy: and, as she sat in the Constellation flying west, fear gripped her at moments. But that was because she had hardly slept since hearing that Hilton and Virginia were back together. Now there was Mark's death, and Tony about to be arraigned on a murder charge!

Jack Taylor met her at the airport. She was calmer when she landed. She was going to face the coming ordeal and the people of Drakefall Point and pay her last respects to Mark. As to the future, it was too confused just yet to make any constructive pattern.

She stopped at the Taylors' house and took Melissa home on arrival. Lulu Pereira had been over in the morning and had given the house a thorough cleaning. A few people telephoned. Not many. She played checkers with Melissa before she went to bed and refused an invitation to have supper with the Taylors.

At the funeral next day she pretended not to hear the asides that were whispered, and she fought to ignore certain of the icy stares. She asked Dorothy Taylor to

collect her mail and place her grocery order at Tom Allbright's store. She could not face the village street just yet. It was lack of sleep, she kept telling herself. How could she make order out of chaos if she could not sleep?

While she was pacing the living-room floor after returning from the funeral, wondering, too, what she would give Melissa for her supper, she heard the cowbell on her gate, which she had forgotten to take down, clang loudly and clumsy footsteps hurry up the gravel path as Tom Allbright's nephew climbed the hill with her groceries. Geoff's usually bovine and moronic eyes were flashing with excitement. Tony Florino, he said, had hanged himself that morning! Did it with his belt! News just came through! He then hurried down the path to spread the news with each successive delivery.

There is a limit to what the human mind can stand when it is tired.

That night she lay in her bed, haunted now by visions of Tony hanging in his cell at the end of the Mexican belt that she had given to him—the kind of belt that he always wore, the kind kids wear today with their cowboy outfits. It had a silver buckle and the leather was ornately embossed. He would wear that belt, he had told her proudly, until his dying day. Now he had made a noose through the silver buckle and placed it around his neck, the neck around which her arms had once held him, and so, with the belt that she had given to him, he had died.

She felt, as she lay in bed staring across the room at the blackness of the night, hearing the trees sway outside and the occasional barking of a dog, waiting for—yet dreading—the dawn, that sleep would never come to her again.

She was then startled by the shattering of glass and she leapt up in her bed. Slipping on her robe she hurried into the living-room. Four windows were smashed and the wind was blowing across the jagged edges and whistling through the darkness of the room. She switched on the light. Amid the broken glass on the floor were three bricks and a small piece of rock. Melissa came running into the room, terrified.

Melissa slept with Libby for the remainder of the night. They held each other closely.

Jack Taylor decided to drop over and have a word with Earl Braithwaite. He did not like the sinister new rumour that was spreading furtively through the village.

Startled by Norma Fields, the suicide of Gladys Marcalis was now being laid at Libby's feet. She was Marcalis's mistress! Wasn't that obvious? Norma asked, wild-eyed. Did anyone *really* believe that Libby earned *that* kind of money acting as a *housekeeper*? Lulu Pereira did the work. What did Libby do for Marcalis? Drive around in a flashy new convertible, wearing fancy new clothes and pay flying visits to New York to be with him! "She's come back from *this* trip," Norma hissed into willing or unwilling ears, "with a diamond wrist-watch, they tell me, costing all of five hundred dollars! Do men give presents like that to their *housekeepers*? It's been obvious all along that she's his mistress. When his poor wife heard about it she killed herself! *Three* deaths you can lay at that woman's feet! She's evil, I tell you—*evil!*"

Norma Fields, who once took fussy pains over her appearance, now walked about the village with darting eyes, her hair bedraggled, her stockings sagging in loose spirals around her spindly legs. That she could see a

golden halo around the Rev. Davidson's head as he walked down the village street, and the devil himself walking beside Libby Carson, indicated that her mental disorder was now reaching the stage of hallucinations. Many who listened to her had to agree, on reflection, that it was strange that Marcalis—a man who demanded the highest efficiency—should choose Libby to take care of his domestic affairs. The obvious choice would have been the efficient Dorothy Taylor. While no one had expressed outspoken criticism at the time of Libby's employment by the shipping magnate, there might easily be something in what Norma said. There were Libby's frequent visits to San Francisco when Marcalis was on the Coast, when she sometimes stayed the night in the city. There was that incident on July the fourth, which most people had heard with their own ears. There were rumours that Libby had been having an affair with young Florino, playing him off against poor Mark, which had led to the knifing outside the Post Office. Tony, it was now said, had heard that Mark had been dating Libby in San Francisco. It was not entirely the question of Libby's morals that caused people to ponder after being cornered by Norma in the village street: it was the unpalatable suggestion, added to the already unpleasant rumours that were rife in the village, that she might also be the cause of Gladys Marcalis committing suicide.

"I've heard that one, too," Earl said, sitting back in an armchair in his living-room after Jack Taylor had repeated this latest rumour. "Heard it from Nancy Battersbury yesterday."

"If Libby hears this one," Jack said, "she'll blow her top. Hasn't she stood enough?"

Earl rose slowly to his feet. "You know, Jack," he

said, walking over to the side table that acted as his bar, "I often think medicine gives greater insight into human character than any of life's callings—and that includes the Church. There's no physical pain in religion, but a lot of illness can hurt like hell." He took the cork from a bottle. "I've seen every woman in this place, Jack, at some time or another in their birthday suits and there's little I don't know about any of them. They open up sometimes, tell me things, intimate things they wouldn't tell even to the parson. Medicine's a curious business, Jack." He put some ice cubes into two glasses, poured in whisky and topped each with soda water. "You see people who're afraid of dying. You see all kinds. Some scream in childbirth before they should. Some grit their teeth. You see women who're all dolled up outside but could spend their time better laundering their undies. You learn character all right." He walked over and handed a glass to his friend. "For Libby I'll say this—she's no fake. Never seen her scared of anything, either. Never had a yelp out of her. Never heard her talk cheaply about anything—or anybody." He paused. "But don't let's put her on a pedestal where she'd hate herself to be. She's human, like any of us—and a darn sight more human than most of us." He walked back to his own chair and sat down, comfortably.

Jack looked across. "You don't *believe* that she's living with Marcalis?"

Earl sipped from his glass. "If she is, it's none of our business."

"But, Earl, this is serious—what they're saying!"

"Who's saying it? Only Norma. The others repeat it like sheep. Norma's got a bee in her bonnet about Libby—and everything adds up. Two and two make four every time. It all makes sense if you think as Norma

does that the greatest sin in the world is to get into the wrong bed, which she thinks Libby's doing all the time. As far as Marcalis is concerned the timing's right. Shortly after Libby starts working for him, his wife jumps out of a window. So Libby's responsible. She's having an affair with the husband. It all makes sense to Norma, who feels this to be a crusade. She feels she's doing right. There's nothing vindictive about it."

Jack leaned forward in his chair. "*Vindictive!* You take all this as if it didn't matter. You even talk as if you believe it!"

Earl drank, thoughtfully. "On the contrary," he said. "In the first place I happen to know that Gladys Marcalis had been on the biggest drinking jag of her life before they put her back in hospital that time. They cut down on her alcohol too fast. What I'm saying is, Libby's vulnerable every time Norma adds up the score. She'll be certifiable soon. So don't get mad at Norma, Jack. Feel sorry for anyone who'll end up in the nut house."

"But the way she's talking makes some cheap kind of a whore of Libby, and that's what some people are, calling her! People listen to you, Earl. They listened to you over that business on the cabin cruiser. Do something!"

Earl drank again from his glass. "If by that business on the cabin cruiser you mean the commentary, I merely repeated what Virginia had said, She blew that story sky-high and I merely reminded people that she had." Sipping again, he said, "You hit the ceiling every time anyone suggests that Libby isn't a virgin, Jack. If you and I were footloose and free and still gay young bachelors, we'd be trying to make Libby with every trick we knew. Don't let's fool ourselves." He looked

across slyly. "That being established, without, I notice, any opposition from your corner, let's talk no more about morality, as such. What Libby does is her own affair, and if men can't take care of themselves, that's just too bad." He glanced over again at the most inherently decent man he knew. Jack was a failure in life, but he had qualities that far surpassed those of his detractors. Jack had an almost naïve simplicity, but he was warm and clean and honest. He loved the guy.

"But to put your mind at rest," Earl continued, "you mentioned just now the time I opened my mouth over that business on July the fourth. I don't, as you know, open my mouth very often on local affairs, but I opened it again yesterday after hearing what Norma was saying." Wryly he said, "I didn't go in for any high-falutin talk about morality, Jack. That would have gotten no place. I took a more effective line. That's why I told you to take it easy and let this ride."

Jack leaned forward in his chair. "What did you do?"

"I telephoned to Luke last evening to drop by for a drink. If there's a free drink going, as you know, Luke doesn't waste time in coming over. He sat," Earl continued, "in the chair you're sitting in. I told him, as Norma's doctor, what I thought of her condition. I also told Luke of the trouble he's running into. Marcalis, I said, was powerful. If Marcalis heard the story Norma was putting around—and there were plenty of people here to tell him—he'd have one of the biggest libel suits slapped on him this country had known, good and quick. My advice to Luke was to go personally to Ada Kingston and Judge Prout, and to anyone else that wife of his has been talking to, and put things straight, also good and quick." He smiled. "That cheap son-of-a-bitch was out of this house like a scalded cat." He

drained his glass and then, as though a page were turned and a chapter ended, he said, "How about I give you a check-up while you're over? Still keeping to three drinks a day, like I told you?"

"No," Jack confessed.

Earl rose to his feet and walked over to the side table, chuckling. "A thing I like about you, Jack, is you never lie, even to your medical practitioner." He put down his glass and walked to the door, still chuckling. "Come into my office and we'll see what shape you're in."

Earl was listening to his favourite programme on the radio when Libby telephoned, but he put on his jacket and got out his car right away.

Earl treated his patients with cheerful and apparent unconcern: and many said that his entrance into a sick room did a patient more good than all the expensive medications. With a gay, "Hi," he carried his small leather bag into the living-room of Libby's house, telling her on the way that he had brought along some panes of glass and some putty in case more rocks were thrown while he was up here. To laugh about her broken windows turned the whole hideous incident into a joke—the kind of joke that children play at Halloween. With a "Well, who is it *this* time—you, Melissa or the cat?" he put his bag down on to the table. That remark again was typical of Earl: for the last time that he was here on a professional call the cat had given birth to kittens in the kitchen and Earl was asked by Melissa to prescribe professionally—which Earl did with suitable solemnity. When Earl was around, problems had a way of disappearing.

Hiding her tiredness, she said, "I'm afraid it's me, this time."

She fixed him a highball and they sat either side of the fireplace. When she told him of her insomnia, he made light of that, too: but his leather case was already opened and he was searching inside for the correct phial. He then asked her for an envelope and tipped some capsules inside.

"These are strong, Libby. One's enough. But I'll let you take two tonight. You can take two tomorrow night. But that's where you stop. After that, one each night for a week. *One*," he repeated as he carefully counted the capsules.

Libby took the envelope and placed it on the mantelpiece. Earl always put people on trust, a trust that one could never abuse. She had, in any case, never considered an overdose as a way out; and she wondered if Earl had that in mind when he made that remark.

"Are you in a hurry, Earl?"

He lay back in the armchair, studying her. "You should know that a doctor never leaves a patient, Libby, until every symptom is diagnosed."

She reached for a cigarette. "I need no physical examination, Earl."

"No; but you've lost a little weight. Suppose we dispense with any physical examination for a moment and have a talk. Sit down, but put some more water in this before you do. Even at my age," he added, "I have to think about the lining to my stomach."

She walked over to the drink tray and added water to his glass, remembering that it was Jerd who had first taught her never to serve a man a puny drink.

"Earl."

"Yes?"

"You'd heard, of course, that I'm a witch?"

He chuckled. "Yes, I heard that one."

She walked over to his chair. "Do *you* think I'm evil?"

"I think you're sometimes . . . a little foolish," he said, reaching up for the glass.

"Aren't we all foolish, sometimes?"

"Yes," he agreed, "I suppose we are. But you're too intelligent to do foolish things . . . foolishly."

"How much do you know, Earl?"

"Nothing that I've inquired into," he said, "but I hear all kinds of talk on my daily visits. I'm like the parish priest, only I don't ask people to come to confession. So what I hear goes in one ear and out the other. Unless," he added, glancing up at her again, "it's important—when it stays inside."

"Earl, I'm not a nympho, like Nancy Battersbury's saying, like I suppose a lot of people are saying. For a woman of my age—and I'm thirty-three—I've had few affairs. Few, anyway, in comparison to many people. But it's natural for a woman to be loved. I've no husband, Earl. So I've taken love when I needed it, and until now I've never hurt anyone. Not really hurt them. I've not been hurt, either."

"It's the foolish who get hurt," Earl commented over the top of his glass.

She thought that remark over and let her unfinished cigarette drop into the grate. "I guess you're right," she said, at last.

"You've a quality, Libby, most women would give their eyes for. Do you mind if I cut out the frills?"

"That's what I'd like you to do."

"If I laid a lot of photographs in a line and asked a man to choose, I doubt he'd pick you. But if he saw you walk down the street you'd find his eyes following. It's something you've got. When I was at high school and was just learning what it was all about, we called it

'Oomph' and 'It'. Today, more prosaically, we call it sex-appeal. You know you've got it. To what extent you use it, I don't know. But you'd be a damned fool if you didn't. Most women spend their lives trying to achieve it. Throw me a cigarette."

Libby passed him a new pack from the mantelpiece.

"Why did you never marry again, Libby?" he asked, undoing the cellophane.

"The only two men I ever wanted," she replied, after a pause, "I could never have."

"Too bad," he said, lighting a cigarette, still watching her.

"Earl, I pretend I don't care what people say about me. But I *do* care. I care deeply. Every woman cares."

"Of course."

"But have you ever thought how unfair life is—for a woman? I have to suffer passes most weeks of the year. From people who should know better—married men, some of them, with children. Even people on the Bluff who go so piously to church. Are *they* pilloried? No, they're respectable!" Her hands, he noticed, were clenched. "But if a woman accepts the passes, and is found out, she becomes an outcast! In a community this size she's liable to have rocks thrown through her windows!" She gripped the ledge of the mantelpiece.

"Someone once said, Libby, that the greatest tragedies in life were those that never happened. That's worth thinking about for a minute. But let's look at the situation as it is. You've been the leader here, getting the applause. Now people have started throwing rocks. Let's take this rock-throwing, as a start. Only a bunch of kids would do a thing like that. Could even be some of the fishing fleet. Those Italians are a crazy bunch. Maybe," he said, "after breaking up Grunther's place

they had a few drinks and came up here and threw some more. What I'm saying, Libby, is that no one in this community of their right mind would get themselves out of bed in the middle of the night and creep over here to throw rocks. People here go to bed early. So let's clear our minds of thinking that any of the people living here broke your windows. It was either a bunch of kids or the fishing boys who're drunk most of the time they're ashore. So let's forget about the broken windows. *Tongues*, Libby, are a different matter, and it's true some of them are wagging just now. They belong to people who have to keep picking on someone, for that's their natures. There are small-timers living in every place, and we've got our share, although, as I often tell Gloria, there's more good-neighbourliness in Drakefall Point than any place I've been. But let's look at these small-timers. They cut no real ice, so why should you worry about what they're saying? You've got more on the ball than anyone in this community. You don't need me to tell you that. When all this excitement dies down you'll be on top again and have them eating out of your hand." He studied her over the top of his glass. "But let's, in fairness, look at things for a moment through the eyes of those who're doing the shouting. You've been playing the big time in a small town. So you've set the town talking. You must expect that. Because you can snap your fingers and get most men in the town, certain of the ladies here who can't don't like it. You must expect that, too. But what I'm telling you right now is that if you don't stop worrying about what a few small-timers are saying, you're going to crack."

Libby had been listening to Earl, still gripping the mantelpiece. "Then people *are* saying there was something between Tony and me?" she said at last.

"Sure they are. And if I stay up here much longer I'll be next on the list."

"Don't laugh, Earl! For God's sake don't laugh!"

He put down his glass and rose to his feet. "Steady, Libby," he said quietly, holding her arm. "Steady." He let go her arm and reached for the envelope on the mantel and extracted two capsules and walked over to the side table and poured a glass of water. "Take these," he said, returning, and he waited until they were swallowed. "Now get into bed," he said, taking the glass from her, "and I'll come and give you a check-up."

He took her pulse a few moments later, sitting beside her bed while she told him about her affair with Tony, speaking urgently, as though she had little time in which to make the confession and was determined to leave nothing out.

"His body attracted me, Earl! That's all there was to it. I never thought the kid would take it seriously! But he did, Earl! He *did*!"

"Sure," he said soothingly, and he took out a stethoscope from his leather bag.

"Now he's dead! Mark's dead too! And I'm responsible! I *am*!" •

"Don't see what it has to do with you," he replied casually, setting up his instruments. "What other people do isn't *your* business. You never told Tony you'd marry him, did you? Bet you never gave Mark ideas in that direction, either. Now let's check your blood-pressure."

"Earl, I lie here at nights and that's all I think about! Don't you *see*? If it hadn't been for me they'd both be living!"

Earl pretended to look thoughtful.

"Well," he said, "you might as well say the same about Kurt, who sold the liquor. Come to that, might put the blame on the guy in Kentucky who made the whisky.

Could even blame Tony for never touching hard liquor before. Might blame a lot of things. But the only thing *you* can blame yourself for was taking a screwball like Tony for a lover. But then, a lot of women fell for that guy." He picked up his instruments again. "You've got nothing to worry about, Libby," he said. "I'd tell you if you had."

She quietened then, but she looked up at him searchingly.

"You wouldn't fool me, Earl?"

"Not on a matter like that I wouldn't. The guy was drunk. I was down there, remember. He'd have stuck a knife in me if he could—and Phil Parkinson too. And what's *that* got to do with you, I'd like to know?"

"Even after all I've told you . . . you can still say that?"

"Sure."

She relaxed into her pillow and Earl began bandaging her arm to take her blood-pressure, but she was still questioningly watching his face.

"You're not just saying that . . . to make me feel better about it?"

"I'm just trying to drive a little sense into your head," he said.

"I pray you're right, Earl."

"I know darn well I'm right."

After a moment she said, "Earl, there are other things I'd like to tell you. I never slept with a man here till Tony. There was a man here I wanted, once, but I turned him down because he was married."

"A good reason," he said, finishing his bandaging.

"Yet some people here say I'm bad. At Mark's funeral I heard someone refer to me as a whore."

"If you had been, you could have built up quite a business," he said with a chuckle.

"Those things *are* hurtful, Earl, but don't think I can't sleep because of what people are saying."

"So long as you stop thinking you're responsible for Mark dying I don't much care what you think about."

"You believe what I said, don't you, that I never had an affair with any man here till Tony?"

"Sure I believe you."

"That's rather important for you to know, Earl, because of what I'm going to say."

"How about taking it easy for a minute. I've got business to do." He dug her playfully with his stethoscope and placed it to his ears.

"Earl, let me go on talking! What you heard on July the fourth was real. It was *real*, Earl!"

He took the stethoscope from his ears. "I'm trying to check your blood pressure," he remonstrated, but his smile was kindly as he looked down at her. "Suppose you lie quiet for a minute and stop trying to drive the mercury here out through the top?"

Her hand reached out and clutched his arm.

"That's what I want you to know, Earl! What you heard was *real*! Hilt and I love each other! But what do I do? Send him back to his wife to see if they can't make a go of it. Is *that* acting like a witch?"

"No, Libby," he said, again pretending to look thoughtful, "but that's the way I'd expect you to act. Hilt's married. Nice wife. Kids. Now lie quiet for a minute." He replaced the stethoscope to his ears and began pumping, but he did not take any readings then, for he decided to wait until she had quietened. So he let her go on talking, her hands on the counterpane of her bed, her fingers clenched at moments as she fought to hold back her tears.

Earl had known, of course, that what the village had

heard on July the fourth had been an unfortunate moment that was extremely bad luck to be overheard. But he had not realised that the moment had been quite so serious. As he continued to sit by Libby's bed, listening to her story, he wondered if he had ever seen a woman so bruised by a love affair going wrong. But her moments of hysteria were not of the usual kind, cheap and self-pitying. There was depth and sincerity behind every word. When Libby gave, she gave generously. Now she had given all—and been knocked for a loop. It was just too bad. Hilton was a nice guy, too. In many ways a very nice guy. If he knew what he'd done to Libby he'd feel pretty badly. When he and Virginia were over at the house the other evening he had given no indication of his own feelings: but Hilton never by a flicker of an eyelid gave an emotion away. It was just too bad this happening to two such nice people. Meanwhile, Libby was at breaking point and would need careful watching.

As he drove home some time later he thought of her last sleepy words as he made her pillow comfortable before leaving. "When you've something inside that's too big to hold, you've got to talk to someone. But apart from that, Earl, I'd hate *you* to think badly of me."

He had not liked the look of Libby since she returned from New York, especially at the funeral, and he had wondered if he should drop by without waiting for her to call: but Libby was an independent, little person and might resent it. However, many things were now more understandable.

As his headlights picked up the new white paint on his gate he wondered who the married man in the village was whom Libby had turned down. He thought he knew the answer, but that was none of his business. His

concern was whether he should have sent Libby to the hospital: but he would make her his first call in the morning. If she hadn't been able to release some of her mental tension, her breakdown might have been really serious. Anyway, she would be assured of a long sleep tonight.

Gloria was reading as he entered the house. "You've been a long time, darling," she called from the living-room. "Nothing serious?" When he put his head round the door he looked worried, she thought, as he often did when returning from difficult cases. "Was it Libby or the child?"

"Libby."

"What's wrong?"

"Low blood pressure," he answered after a pause, and walked thoughtfully through to his consulting-room at the back.

XV

MA WEDEKIND WAS FACED WITH GRAVE TEMPTATION. If she handed over Tony's letter to the new Judge, the fishing boat would go to Libby. If, on the other hand, she destroyed the letter, the boat would go to Tony's next-of-kin, his father Mario, who was now crippled with arthritis and unable to work. The letter that she had read so frequently, and with such distress, was carried always in the pocket of her apron, handy to be read again in any moment of quiet.

Should she hand the letter over, the fact that Libby had been willed the boat would add further to Libby's discomfort, for the community would then know for certain that there had been something between them.

In favour, therefore, of handing the letter over was the knowledge that Libby's position in the community would be shaken by the disclosure, and that thought gave Ma Wedekind satisfaction. She was by nature a kindly woman, but it angered her deeply to think of Mario, so in need of money, being left with nothing, while Libby—if all she heard were true—was Marcalis's mistress. Hadn't she even come back from New York this time with a diamond wrist-watch costing all of five hundred dollars? But her own dislike of Libby, she felt, must be of secondary importance. What mattered was that if she burned Tony's letter, Mario would have the boat.

Her snack-bar was filled each day with customers, which took her mind off the letter during most of her working hours. Jack Taylor had been in to see her to advise that she take no part in the new scandal that Norma had started, and to give him the name of anyone she heard repeating it. Tired as she was, and heart-sick, she continued to serve her customers, a gentle smile and greeting for each one. But she felt a criminal. Each time she passed the trash burner in the kitchen she had to control the temptation to open the lid, take the letter from her pocket and toss it into the flames. But each time the temptation came to her she reminded herself that this letter contained Tony's last wish on earth—a trust that he had left in her keeping. And so she continued to delay, often tortured in mind, but always courteous with her customers. Ma Wedekind had never done a dishonest action, and she had to be sure that what she wished so fervently to do would be right in the sight of God.

Having carried the letter in her pocket for a week, she decided that a decision must be made—for unless Tony's

letter were soon produced the authorities would regard him as having died intestate and assume his next-of-kin to be the heir. And so, a week later, she served her last customers and saw them to the door, which she bolted for the night, flicked the venetian blinds to a closed position and turned out the lights. She then walked wearily into her kitchen at the back, put some kindling into the trash burner to keep the fire alive, and sat down, taking the creased letter again from her pocket. Tony, she had decided, must have been out of his mind when he wrote that farewell letter from the jail. The poor misguided boy would never, in his right mind, have forgotten his father. Tony had been like a son to her: he came to her always for advice. Had she the chance to speak to him before he wrote that letter she could have explained where his responsibilities lay, and the poor bewildered boy would have listened, as he always did. This thought gave weight to her determination to right the wrong that he had perpetrated in the loneliness of his prison cell without anyone to guide him. That is why she put still more kindling into the trash burner before sitting down to eat a sandwich that Mabel Reindeck had left, for Ma was too tired to make any supper for herself.

As she sat there, chewing, another thought came to her: if she burned Tony's letter she would be destroying the only living proof that he did not choose that way to die because he was afraid to face his trial and take his punishment. He chose that way to die out of grief and remorse. She had been forced to hear people across her counter say that Tony had taken the coward's way out, and each time it had been a whiplash. Tony was no coward! Tony was a man! A real man! For him to be remembered as a coward was just unthinkable!

And so in the quiet of the night, when the inhabitants of Drakefall Point had long been sleeping, Ma Wedekind rose finally from her chair and placed the letter back into its envelope. She would ask Dorothy Taylor to drive her over to see Judge Halliday in the morning. She looked round her untidy kitchen with its unwashed dishes and knew that she hadn't the energy to do anything about them until the morning. But, as Ma Wedekind always did, she made up the day's takings before going up to bed, and made a note to repay Mabel Reindeck, the next time she came in, for the sandwich she hadn't eaten. Libby will now get the boat, she thought, as she wearily climbed the stairs, but one thing's for certain—I'll never speak a civil word to Libby Carson again.

It is easy to start a rumour: it is hard for a rumour to be controlled. The latest one started by Norma had reached every adult in the village, although, as Jack Taylor was busy stressing, let no one be heard repeating it. The people of Drakefall Point knew nothing of law cases: they wanted no trouble, in any case. But that Libby might also be responsible for the suicide of Gladys Marcalis was discussed discreetly, and with concern, in the safety and quiet of certain of the houses.

When the news that Libby had been willed Tony's fishing boat became common knowledge, tongues again became active. Brenda Ford, swaggering about the village street at mail time, dug her hands deep into the pockets of her jeans. "What can Libby do with a fishing boat?" she asked of everyone she met. "Take some guy out, I suppose, and give us another commentary." There were mild sniggers.

Nancy Battersbury had a different approach. Feeling

that the brightness of Libby's star had finally been extinguished, she felt that she could afford to be generous. She gave a brittle smile when the subject of Libby's continued absence from the village street was mentioned. "You mustn't be too hard on her," she said. "She's ashamed to show her face, which is understandable. But let's give her the credit for having a conscience." She then went about her business, her hair dyed three shades lighter, an eager smile for everyone she passed.

There were some who wondered if Libby were malingering. Why should low blood pressure debar visitors from seeing her? True, it was logical, if she were really ill, that Dorothy Taylor should be allowed at the house all the time, for she was a trained nurse. But it was certainly strange that anyone normally so tireless as Libby should shut herself up in her house and refuse to see anyone. Those who questioned Dorothy received the same reply. "Those are Earl's orders," she said.

There were some who had questioned Earl. The Judge had had a private word with him when he came over to see his wife, Maud, who was having worrying abdominal pains. Hearing that Mrs. Carson needed complete rest, the Judge cut some of his finest roses and sent them up to Libby's house with a note expressing hope for her speedy return to health. It was no wonder, he thought, that Mrs. Carson was under mental strain just now, the way people were acting towards her. Ada Kingston, who had also had a word with Earl, wrote one of her usual letters. Ethel Rosali made an apple pie. The Rev. Davidson, inviting prayers for the sick each Sunday, included her name. Al Reindeck walked up, unasked, for her convertible, and gave it its usual oil and grease job and a wash at the same time, spending

many hours waxing and polishing the bodywork afterwards. Tom Allbright, playing safe, merely asked Dorothy when she came down to do Libby's marketing, to express his regret at her indisposition. Until he knew which way the wind was blowing he didn't want to take any sides.

But there were other subjects discussed each morning outside the Post Office. Hilton and Virginia Sands had vacated the Emily Prout house, although the rent was paid until the second week in September. There was growing gossip about Louis Marcalis, who had not been seen in the village since the suicide of his wife; nor had Catherine returned. Clarabelle, the coloured maid, they said was eating her head off and ordering groceries like crazy from Tom Allbright's store—which gossip grew in retelling so that Clarabelle was now alleged to be going drunk to bed each night because she had nothing better to do. Rumour had it that Marcalis was selling the house and asking a fancy price. Lulu Pereira, who still tottered up to the house each morning to do the cleaning, answered each inquiry with a toothless grin. "I don't know nothing, but Mrs. Carson still pays me the dough regular."

There was a feeling of sultry static about the village, which could so easily, and in a moment, swirl into another storm. The summer visitors went about their daily pleasures on the beach, but there was a feeling of uneasiness about the community. So many unhappy things had happened this season, so many unpleasant rumours were rife: and since Libby Carson had ceased to be in circulation even the small village parties seemed to have lost their fun.

Ma Wedekind's own uneasiness over Tony's letter continued, for, having handed it to Judge Halliday, she

was assailed by new doubts. It seemed only yesterday that Tony had said across her counter, "I trust you, Ma, like I trust the Virgin Mary." Had she, then, abused his trust? People were now talking of the affair, and she listened uncomfortably to what was said. For someone whose daily problem had been the ordering and cooking of simple food, her responsibility about the letter still kept her awake at nights, and it continued to trouble her by day. She was now convinced that the letter should have been burned.

Judge Halliday called in to see her a few mornings later. With Dr. Braithwaite's permission, he said, he had been allowed to visit Mrs. Carson, who had expressed a wish that the boat be sold and the proceeds shared among the fishing fleet, if that were also the wish of Mario Florino. Otherwise, let Mario decide what was to be done. Mrs. Carson, the new Judge added, appeared to be a young woman of charm and intelligence. After hearing the recent scandals he had expected to meet a frivolous young person. Instead, he had been greatly impressed by her sincerity. Altogether, a very delightful young woman. She appeared, however, to be under mental strain at the moment, and he was only allowed to visit her for a short while. Judge Halliday was sure that the fishing boys would want Mario to have the boat, and he was on his way to have a word with Aldo Frascati.

Ma Wedekind wiped the counter over after the new Judge had left, thoughtful and perplexed.

A few moments later Dorothy Taylor came in for a cup of coffee. She sat on a high stool, and after talking about the agenda for the next meeting of the Parent Teachers Association—to which Ma paid scant attention—Dorothy mentioned that Libby was feeling more

rested. "If people," she said, stirring her coffee, "knew some of the kind things she's done since she had more dollars to play with, they'd stop all this talk. Jack got so mad the other night that he took a slug at Luke Fields, who now wants to charge him with assault."

"Was Jack a little . . . high?" Ma asked sympathetically, leaning across the counter.

"We never keep liquor in the house," Dorothy replied, "except when we have a party," and Ma Wedekind, who heard many things, said nothing to that. "But does Jack get mad when people start picking on Libby! Without her, I don't mind telling you, we'd have been eating badly this summer. I expect you've heard that business isn't exactly good with us just now. Everyone seems to know your business in this place."

Ma looked sadly across the street over Dorothy's shoulder. "Yes," she agreed, "nothing's secret here, Dot."

"People say Jack drinks," Dorothy said, continuing to stir her coffee. "Couldn't they talk instead about all the fine qualities he has? It's the same with Libby. I've got to know her better this summer. Surt, she likes to flirt a bit. She hasn't a husband now. She's young, too. But do people talk about the *kind* things she does? There'd be some red faces here if some of the things she's done for people got around."

"How, dear?" Ma asked, leaning nearer across the counter.

"Well, she's been wonderful—to us. I don't mind who knows that."

"But *red*, dear, you said?"

Dorothy put down her spoon. "Well, young Florino as a start. *She* paid the money last time Judge Prout fined him a hundred dollars. What would people be

saying here now if they knew Tony took money off a woman? Would he still be the hero?"

"Tony never took money off Libby!"

"Sure he did. She never told me, though. She wouldn't."

"I don't believe it," Ma Wedekind said, straightening up. "I'll never believe that, Dot. Not of Tony. He wouldn't take money off a woman. He was proud—and a man!" She held her head high for a moment and ran tired hands down her hips. "No, Dot, I'll never believe that one."

"Well, it's a fact. Tony didn't mind taking money off *any* woman. Jack stopped by at Joe's Bar the other night when he had clients to entertain, and Aldo Frascati told him. The fishing boys don't go to Kurt Grunther's any more, as you know. Frascati told Jack that Libby had given Tony money more than once."

"And never repaid it?"

Dorothy smiled. "No, Ma. Never repaid any of his other women at the places his boat called in." She glanced over her shoulder as Professor Carmichael and his wife entered for their morning cup of coffee and turned back to the lined face across the counter to say, "I know you thought a lot of Tony, Ma, but he was nothing but a heel, really, as Jack always says he was." The Professor and his wife were now within earshot and Dorothy decided to say no more. Placing a dime on the counter, she got down from the stool. "And I'll take a pint of ice-cream for Libby. Make it strawberry."

Ma Wedekind stood for a moment, then reached behind her for a cardboard container, said hello to the Carmichaels and walked to the end of the counter and lifted a lid and began scooping out ice-cream. When the container was filled, she placed it into a bag and handed

it to Dorothy, who was searching in her purse for the right change.

"No," Ma said, shaking her head. "You just give that to Libby from *me*, will you, and tell her hello."

XVI

SEPTEMBER CAME and with it the Labour Day week-end, with the gala dance at the Yacht Club which heralded the close of the summer season. Mothers had already begun thinking of the children's school clothes and considering the prospect of packing: fathers, whose own vacations were already over and who were now visiting only at week-ends, looked forward to the end of their mid-week bachelor life. The younger of the permanent residents, planning and sewing their fancy-dress costumes for the dance, felt the end of the season keenly. Here in Drakefall Point their own lives would return to the winter routine after the last car had driven away through the main street, hands waving sadly from each window and luggage piled high. The summer visitors, it is true, would return for occasional visits before next summer to open and air their houses, to take advantage of exceptionally sunny weather, or to return urgently to attend to storm damage when bay trees snapped like match-sticks in a storm and tore jagged holes in roofs. But these short visits were made by the parents, for the children were then in their schools or colleges. And so the end of the summer season left many of the younger people discontented, while many of the elderly looked forward to having the village returned to themselves.

Judge Prout, carefully checking his August grocery bill from Tom Allbright's store, noticed that Tom was now charging four cents more for coffee than the stores in Inverness or Point Reyes Station. He also noticed that he had not been credited with some empty soda-water bottles which had been returned. Small items like these, accumulating each month, could amount to quite a few dollars in the course of a year. He wondered if he should take the matter up with Tom, who always sent his bills out around the twenty-fifth of the month but was especially prompt about it at the close of the season: but he decided that he'd be damned if he'd have some storekeeper thinking he was short of cash. So he wrote out the cheque in full in his spidery handwriting, and then sat studying his bank statement, wondering if there were any items on which he could still cut down.

He re-lit the cigar that he had half smoked after breakfast and walked thoughtfully to the window. The setting sun was playing among the sail-boats on the bay, sometimes catching a sail broadside so that there was a sudden flash of light. His village was indeed beautiful, he thought—beautiful in spite of everything.

He had not discussed with his wife the question of selling some land to Luke Fields, who kept badgering him about it. That skinflint was offering a small price, but the money would be useful. He had not mentioned the matter to his wife because she did not yet know that she was to have a serious operation: and, as things stood, the price that Luke was offering would pay for her surgery and hospitalisation. It was a sorry thing, he thought, as he puffed sparingly on his cigar, that such a great country as his should not have found ways of treating the sick of his class without such crippling cost.

But no cost mattered where Maud was concerned, and he supposed that the land would have to go.

He stood at the window until his cigar had been smoked to its last wet half-inch. Luke would only want the land for speculative building. He was sure of that. He had already heard rumours that Luke had ideas for starting a big development next year. Not even Louis Marcalis would do a thing like that. Not even Louis Marcalis. . . . He removed the cigar butt from his lips without burning his fingers, and dropped it into a flower-pot. Waiting until he was completely calm, he walked into his wife's bedroom to ask what she would like for her supper.

Ada Kingston, while the sun had been setting that evening, had been sitting in her garden, where she had been entertaining some of the summer visitors to the farewell tea that she gave each year—a tea that was followed by mint-juleps, should her guests care to stay a little longer and gossip on the lawn. When all her guests had left, she walked into the house and put on a warm jacket over her elegant tea-gown and came back into her garden and sat watching the humming-birds dart and hover above her and disappear as quickly as they came, and noticing how the birds had already started to eat the red berries on her mountain ash, a tree of which she was especially fond.

It had been a disastrous summer, she decided. It would be good, in so many ways, to settle back into their quiet winter routine. She was not getting any younger, either, and was beginning to feel her age, finding that entertaining many people tired her and that her ankles swelled when she stood for any length of time. Emily Prout, according to her last letter, would

not rent her house again next summer: she found that staying with relations who were growing deaf gave her laryngitis and the effort was too tiring. We are all getting older, Ada thought, and each in our own way. As she contemplated the elderly in the village, she thought of them as she had once known them—the women in their long dresses and straw hats, the men neat in their sombre clothes and stiff white linen collars and derby hats. Today these same men—the ones who were still alive—wore sloppy sports shirts, open at the neck, some copying the horrible example of President Truman and not tucking the shirt inside their trousers. She had seen many changes indeed in latter years, and few for the better. But she still loved her village and those who belonged in it. She was troubled, and deeply, about what would happen to Drakefall Point when she and the Judge and others had gone, and her anxiety about Homer himself had not lessened. There had grown since the First World War, twenty-five years before, a new generation of rich who seemed bereft of the obligations that wealth entailed. After the recent war, during which people like Luke Fields were able to make enough money to retire, the situation had deteriorated still further. Luke cared little for the traditions of the village: he was concerned only in using the handsome profits that he had made while the boys were fighting the war overseas to increase his fortunes still farther by new developments and promotions. She had heard recently that he was after that tract of land below the Judge's house. He seemed to think that Maud would die from the operation and that the Judge, grief-stricken, would shortly follow her to the grave, or be forced to sell because, alas, it now seemed common knowledge that Homer Prout was feeling the pinch.

The more she saw of Luke Fields, the less she liked him. She liked his wife even less, with her poison pen letters, imagining that no one would know who wrote them. She had now started to write letters about Jack Taylor. Dr. Braithwaite and Judge Halliday had now had a serious talk to her and the letters temporarily had ceased. The wretched woman was, of course, dotty. But Luke wasn't. .

As the evening chill drew in and the trees began to sway and she felt goose-pimples forming on her flesh, Ada drank the last of her mint-julep. She'd a damned good mind to buy that tract of land herself and deed it to the village. Then no one could buy it *or build on it!* Entering the house, she rang for her faithful coloured maid and asked her to fix dinner a little later because she was going to take a bath, and she walked determinedly, but majestically, upstairs.

Libby, still confined to the house, had also watched the setting sun that evening. Earl, who had had many quiet talks with her while she had been ill, had a way of simplifying the problems of the mind, giving his patients a philosophy as soothing as his medications. She listened to all he said as he continued to sort out her mind about the deaths of Tony and of Mark. But everything takes a little longer when one is sick and vitality is low.

She had heard that Hilton and Virginia had left the village; and although she did not expect ever to hear from Hilton again she had secretly hoped that he would call, perhaps in person, before he left. Each time the telephone rang while she had been in bed she strained her ears; each time a car passed along the lane outside she waited to hear if it would stop: and when a car did stop she listened for a car door to slam and for the sound

of footsteps walking up to the house. She had grown to know the sound of each car—Dorothy's, which came so regularly; Earl's, which made far less noise; and Tom Allbright's store truck delivering groceries. She had also learned to recognise the tread of those who came on foot, to be met by Melissa or Dorothy at the door, and had tried to overhear what was being said in their whispered conversations. Her only outside visitor had been Judge Halliday, whom Earl brought up to the house and allowed her to see for a little while about Tony's fishing boat. But today she was out of bed for the first time, facing life again on her own two feet.

Last night she had listened to Hilton on the radio. She had not been brave enough to listen to him until now: and while she had been ill Earl had taken away the small radio from beside her bed. But last night she had tiptoed into the living-room at eight o'clock to hear his comments upon world affairs. He would not, he had said at the end of his allotted time, be on the air again—at least; he could not say definitely when he would be back. There seemed, she felt, a sadness about him as he spoke those words, a sadness that had tormented her ever since.

Now the summer season was ending and the bleakness of winter lay ahead, with the boisterous poker games on Saturday nights, the gossip of the village street at mail times. Apart from the hostility that she was now meeting in the village, how, after Hilton, could she face the smallness of it all?

She rose from the couch and began to pace to and fro, finally standing at the window watching the sailboats on the bay below, the sun playing among their sails. By the time the sun had disappeared behind the

bay trees she was still standing there, trying to come to a very big decision.

While Ada Kingston sat thoughtfully sipping her final mint-julep and while Judge Prout was heating up a can of soup for his wife over the oil stove in his kitchen, Libby sat on her bed re-reading the only letter that Hilton had ever written to her, a letter that she already knew by heart. She was still sitting there, the torn pieces in her hand, quietly sobbing, when Dorothy Taylor drove over with her supper. .

XVII

THREE DAYS LATER LIBBY TOOK HER FIRST WALK, going over to Catherine Cottage to see that everything was in order before Louis Marcalis arrived. Catherine was flying out with him and was to stay a few days with Janet Blore before they both returned to the University. Harry Bicroff was, as usual, accompanying his employer, acting as Louis' valet and chauffeur on arrival.

It was a hot and oppressive day, not a leaf stirring in the trees. The bay looked like a sheet of glass, when Libby caught glimpses of it through the trees; and the anchored sail-boats were lazily reflecting their shimmering patterns, as though into a mirror. Heat rose from the hot, dusty side road as she walked, and bees buzzed among the flowers in Nancy Battersbury's front garden as she passed. There seemed no other movement.

As she reached the main road to the Bluff, the tarred surface was in places melting into little bubbles. She there met some of the residents on their way down for their mail. The first was the Rev. Davidson, who

expressed his pleasure at seeing her about again. He would, he said, mopping his face—for he was perspiring freely in his clerical attire—have called upon her, but Dr. Braithwaite had told him that no visitors were allowed. He then asked if there was any truth in the rumour that Mr. Marcalis was selling his house. With feminine intuition she answered, after telling him that no decision about the house had been taken as far as she knew, that should Mr. Marcalis sell she was sure that he would not overlook any financial promises he had made to the village—which seemed to give satisfaction to the parson, whose stipend Marcalis had guaranteed.

While they stood chatting, Judge Prout strode by, doffing his hat, a stout stick in his hand, his dog following. Libby watched his tall, lean figure stalking slowly up the hill and noticed a hole in the heel of one sock.

Norma Fields passed untidily by with her canvas marketing bag and bowed beamingly to the parson when he raised his hat, but ignored Libby's presence with a haughty toss of her head. Two of the young summer visitors passed by, women who used to talk to her on the beach. They said hello to the parson, but cut her dead.

Ada Kingstorf's old Cadillac drove out from her gate and the car drew up beside them while Ada made inquiries about Libby's health and informed the Rev. Davidson that he could certainly use her drawing-room for his Confirmation classes if he really thought the children would pay more attention there, and she seemed amused by the suggestion. After she had offered the parson a ride down to the Post Office, which was graciously accepted, the ancient automobile continued on its way.

Libby met Dr. Fletcher before she reached the

Marcalis gate. He told her how he sat up half the night with Ed Tracey's sheep-dog after it had been run over by a truck. "But the old rascal will come through all right," he said, smiling contentedly. "P'raps he'll learn to keep out of the way of trucks in future. Nice dog Ed's got." Expressing pleasure at seeing her about again, he proceeded on his way, an old baseball cap on his head, a large pipe between his teeth.

Libby noticed with satisfaction, once she entered the Marcalis drive, that there were no weeds on the path and that the flower beds looked trim. She had been paying Mario Florino his weekly wage since his arthritis got so bad, for that is what Louis would have wished: and Ed Tracey's boy had been taking care of the weeding and watering. Libby entered the house and passed through into the living-room and began arranging the flowers she had ordered to be delivered from the local nursery that morning, clipping the ends of the cut flowers and arranging them in vases. She then placed the vases around the house. She heard Lulu humming as she worked.

Libby then went into the kitchen and talked to Clarabelle, to make sure that the dinner would be cooked and served as she had planned it with such care.

"All this fancy food for two folks, Mrs. Carson?"

"Yes—just for two."

A coal-black face, large and glistening, loosened into a smile. "My!" she cried, running her hand down her ample hips. "I thought we must be entertaining the President of the United States." She started to laugh, as coloured folk do, first chuckling, then laughing uproariously.

"Yes, Clarabelle, just two for dinner—Mr. Marcalis and myself. Harry Bicroff will have dinner served in his quarters."

She closed the door behind her. Clarabelle was still chuckling. The clock on the hall shelf had stopped and she reached underneath for the key and wound it, setting it to the correct time. Clarabelle had grown indolent while she had been ill—which was a further reason for bringing her up to scratch tonight by ordering a good dinner. She looked into Louis' study to see that the cigarette boxes were filled with his special cigarettes. She then left the house and took the short cut home through the woods. Even this small amount of exercise had tired her, especially in the oppressive heat.

She was resting on her bed after lunch when the telephone rang. She had taken off her clothes and was lying in her negligée, for the room was airless. She slipped on a wrap and walked into her living-room. The call was Western Union, with a telegram for Mrs. Carson. She listened while it was read to her: it was from Miss Kennedy, Louis' secretary in New York. She had omitted to put some important papers into his briefcase, but these would be following by air-mail, special delivery.

Then Louis is not calling at his office, she thought, as she hung up: he'll be coming straight out here, dropping Catherine off at the Blores' house in San Francisco on the way. She made a note of Miss Kennedy's message and clipped it to the other notes that she had made to remind her of things to be discussed on Louis' arrival. The household accounts, which she had brought up to date that morning, were already checked and neatly typed. Even Louis had congratulated her on being efficient. How odd, she thought as she walked back into her bedroom, that one can take such good care of other people's affairs and make such a pathetic failure of one's own.

Melissa and little Peggy Taylor arrived breathlessly and perspiringly from the beach and asked for some money to go down to Ma Wedekind's to buy ice-cream and popsicles, bringing sand into the house and making a great deal of noise. Noise still bothered her, but she pretended not to mind, going to her purse and handing each a quarter and taking Melissa aside to tell her that she would be staying the night with Commander and Mrs. Taylor and that she was to be sure to thank them before she went to bed. One must never, she told Melissa, take things for granted. She then gave the children an extra quarter to buy some comic books and they ran down the hill screaming with delight.

The little poppet still lisped. She watched them open the gate and hurry away, leaving the cowbell to clang loudly. Tomorrow, she decided with a frown, that bell must come down. She had meant to take it down so many times; but everything would be tidied now. Everything.

She stood until the sound of the bell had died into an echo and the children's voices could no longer be heard. She then walked back into the living-room, wondering if she should wait for Louis to telephone on his arrival, or should she be up at the house to greet him? She should, she knew, have replied to his letter. It would have been far easier to have answered him that way: but she preferred to talk to him, face to face. No man had been kinder to her, or more gracious, than Louis Marcalis—and asked so little in return. To end their association with a hand-written note seemed too shabby a way to repay him. So she had left his letter unanswered.

At sundown she undressed and walked thoughtfully into the bathroom and stood for a long time under the

shower. This was not an evening to which she looked forward. It would mean the end of a fairy-tale and a return to the monotony of living. Ambition can lead to strange places and she had played for high stakes since meeting Louis. But she had overbid her hand.

She dried herself slowly and walked back into the bedroom. As there was no one in the house, she did not trouble to put on her wrap and she caught a glimpse of herself in the long mirror. Except for paler shades over her breasts and midriff, her body was tanned to a golden brown. As she stood naked before the mirror it pleased her to see that she still had the body of a well-developed teen-ager. She was glad of that, if only for Hilton's sake, who had taken such delight in her. She had never felt any shyness with Hilton. Never.

She sat on the bed and drew on her stockings. In the *Star* that morning it had been officially reported that Hilton had been dropped by his sponsor: and Barney Balchin had added a paragraph of his own, referring to Hilton derisively in his column as *Radio's latest Casanova*. She fastened each stocking to its garter and continued to sit on the side of her bed, staring at nothing.

A breeze rustled the curtains, making her shiver. A door slammed. She glanced over at the windows. Leaves were falling from the trees and scudding across the patio. The bay trees were nodding like long ostrich feathers, dipping and swaying. The Weather-man had forecast a storm that evening, Dr. Fletcher had told her that morning. Northern California was badly in need of rain, anyway, he said.

She stood at the window, watching the first raindrops fall. They fell almost singly at first, large and spreading to the size of a fifty-cent piece until the warm-dry bricks sucked them up thirstily. Then they fell more heavily

until the rain became a torrent and the water gushed along the gutters of the roof and the bay trees swayed to and fro outside in a frenzy. She looked at the sky, at the black clouds racing in from the Pacific, and wondered if Louis' plane had yet landed at the airport, or was he already heading here in the car with Harry Bicroff at the wheel?

She turned away and walked over to the dressing-table. Lightning scared the sky and there was a roar of thunder, which burst overhead, then rumbled angrily across the bay.. The rain then poured down like a tropical storm. As she sat before the mirror to do her make-up, she remembered that it had rained the first night that she had been alone with Louis, the night that he engaged her.

When she was dressed, she studied herself in the long mirror. The Hattie Carnegie dress which Louis insisted that she buy for herself in New York was far too svelte for Drakefall Point, but Louis liked women to look svelte and had a preference for black.

The storm was now blowing with gale force, battering against the house. The golden sunshine of a few moments before had turned suddenly into winter darkness, as though a light had been switched off. The wind, blowing still more fiercely, fought its way through unseen cracks in the redwood walls, and Libby shivered again. She walked then to her clothes closet and took out the only fur coat that she possessed—a well-worn nutria. The only clean pair of white gloves that she could find had a small hole in the index finger of the right hand, but if she took them off hurriedly on arrival Louis might not notice. •Dressed for the street, she picked up her handbag and walked dejectedly into the half-light of the living-room—to wait.

XVIII

THE PLANE in which Louis and Catherine Marcalis were travelling arrived late at San Francisco airport; but Harry Bicroff, also a passenger, was soon at the wheel of their waiting car. After a short stop at the Blores' house on Nob Hill—where Catherine was to stay until she returned to the University—Marcalis told his chauffeur-valet to drive straight to Drakefall Point and to hurry. As was his custom, he sat alone and silent in the back seat throughout the journey, chain-smoking, expressionless, even when the gale blew with such force that Bicroff had difficulty in controlling the car and the rain fell at times so violently that the windscreen wipers gave little vision. Only, at nearly eight o'clock, as they finally descended the winding road into the village did Marcalis make a comment: some trees must have fallen in the storm bringing down the power lines, he remarked, for the village appeared to be in darkness.

Rain was still cascading down when they reached his house: and as Marcalis entered he saw that the outer hall was lit by candles. Taking off his wet top-coat, he entered the living-room. A hurricane lamp stood on the centre table and a fire was burning in the grate. He walked into his study. A fire was burning there, too, and another hurricane lamp stood on a small table by the side of the chair that he always used. The flowers, he noticed, were beautifully arranged. With his meticulous mind, he remembered that no hurricane lamps had been bought for the house.

On his desk lay a file of papers, neatly clipped together. He walked over and found that they were the household

accounts. He glanced through them, noticing how each item had been carefully checked. There was a note about Miss Kennedy's telegram in Libby's writing, writing that he had hoped to see in a letter in answer to the one that he had written in advance of his visit. No reply to that letter had come.

There was a knock on the door and Harry Bicroff entered to say there was no hot water for him to take a shower owing to the break in the power lines. Dinner, now, would also be a little late. Clarabelle, frightened by the thunder and lightning, had retired to her room in near-hysterics, but Mrs. Carson was cooking the dinner over her own oil stove across the way and would be along with it as soon as it was prepared.

Marcalis spoke to Libby on the telephone a moment later, saying that he was sending Bicroff over with the car. On no account was she to cook the dinner: they would have something cold from the ice-box. She would bring some hot soup over in a thermos, then, she said.

He replaced the receiver and rang for Bicroff. Would he set up a drink tray and serve dinner on a card-table before the fire in the study. He wished a bottle of champagne put on ice before he drove over for Mrs. Carson—the best champagne. He then went to his private suite and carried out his ablutions in cold water, changing his suit and underclothes, the wind still howling outside, the trees in their torment bending so low that they sometimes scraped across the roof.

He did not hear the car return. There was a sudden rush of air and a door slammed in the distance. He walked into the hall, but he was too late to help Libby off with her coat. They shook hands formally and entered the living-room together, Harry Bicroff proceeding to the kitchen with the thermos of soup.

They talked commonplace when the living-room door had closed behind them: about the strong head-wind that his plane had encountered; how the wind had blown cars off their track on the Golden Gate Bridge; how some of the low-lying roads were already under water—he sipping a Dubonnet and she the weak Bourbon highball that she had mixed for herself. While they continued to stand before the fire forcing idle conversation, he watched her covertly. There were nervous movements in her hands as she smoked a cigarette and as she toyed with the glass between her fingers: and when she seemed unaware that he was watching her there was disquiet in her eyes.

The storm grew still more violent. Smoke curled viciously from the fireplace and the curtain billowed. Rain beat against the plate glass windows like buckshot from a gun, then hammered on the roof. When the anger of the storm quietened for a moment, he turned to her.

“You did not answer my letter.”

“No,” she replied, looking down into the fire.

“And talking of letters, I had one from someone in the village the other day to say you are a witch.” He walked over to the drink tray and put down his glass. “This writing of anonymous letters is very stupid. If people will not put their name to a letter, what good is it? But do not worry. I have many times been called a devil.”

Bicroff entered and set up a card-table, laid upon it a clean white tablecloth, set two places and left the room.

“Is it because you bewitch so many people that they write these things to me?”

“I know who wrote it,” she replied evasively, still looking down into the fire. “Earl says she’s now a mental case.”

"And who is Earl?"

"Our doctor."

"I see." He fingered the glass that he had just put down.

"Did Catherine tell you she wishes to live in Paris?"

"No; but I've known she wanted to go abroad and study painting."

"Tonight I gave her permission to go. She will leave, I think, some time after Christmas. There is now no reason for keeping this house."

"What will you do with it, Louis?" she asked, turning to him.

"I shall give it to the village," he said.

"For what?"

He shrugged. "A rest home, perhaps . . . whatever the community wishes. I shall, at some later time, discuss this matter with Miss Kingston and Judge Prout." He looked across at her. "So this is the last time that you and I will be dining together here."

She reached for her pack of cigarettes on the mantelpiece and took one out, and he walked over to light it for her. Her eyes were still averted, and in the flame of his lighter he admired again her long dark lashes. The last time they had dined together had been in New York at the Stork Club in a large party that he had given for some business associates and their wives and she, in Catherine's absence, had acted as hostess for him. That was the first time that she had worn the Hattie Carnegie dress. She seemed happier that night than he had ever known her to be, thrilled to see so many celebrities in one room, aware that she was well-dressed, her cheeks flushed, her eyes radiant. He had asked her during that evening what jewellery she possessed. Only a few bracelets, a cheap wrist-watch and some costume jewellery, he discovered. She had worn the costume

jewellery that night, but she confessed laughingly that the wrist-watch would have let her down. The next morning he bought her a small diamond-studded watch on Fifth Avenue. He was glad that she was wearing it tonight. He noticed the wedding ring on her finger—the only thing about her that was bogus, he decided. But who, in fighting their way up-hill, does not put on a false front at some time or another?

Tonight there was no gaiety in her eyes, no spontaneity in her conversation, no laughter. In addition, she looked finely drawn. It was an evening, he decided, that would not be easy and he had better control the conversation in its early stages: but he would wait until they were alone at dinner before raising the subject of his letter; and he would lead up to that with all the subtlety at his command. At the moment things did not look at all propitious.

Suddenly, his keen eyes watching her searchingly, he asked, "Did you come to live in Drakefall Point because you knew that Miss Kingston was, shall we say, Melissa's great-aunt?"

Puzzled, she turned to him. "How did you learn about that?"

"For the same reason, I suppose, that you did—the similarity of name. Is that why you came to live here?"

"If I'd known, I wouldn't have come. Obviously."

"You found out, then, after you arrived?"

She turned back to the fire. "A long time after I arrived."

"How, then, did you discover the relationship?"

Again she turned to him. "Jerd had, I remembered, an Aunt Ada in California, a very favourite aunt."

"Does Miss Kingston know about her, shall we say, relationship to Melissa?"

"Of course she doesn't."

"I would not be too sure of that," he said.

"How could she possibly know?"

"She has, I understand, been very gracious to Melissa?"

"Miss Kingston is always gracious."

"It must have pleased you to find that she became so interested in your child—being of the same proud stock as Melissa's father. Have you corresponded with him since you arrived here?"

"Never."

"Could he, do you think, have told his aunt that you live here?"

"He doesn't know where I live."

The question had importance for him only because Jerd Seymour Kingston conducted certain of his financial deals, and he might have to make some changes.

"So you do not think that Miss Kingston knows?" he asked, looking at her searchingly again. "Or that Jerd Kingston knows?"

"Louis," she replied, wearily, "Jerd and I haven't corresponded since the war. That part of my life was sealed off nearly ten years ago. As far as Miss Kingston is concerned, I'm sure she doesn't know, and as far as I'm concerned she never will. To me, they're two people I'll always be proud to have known. Now let's talk about something else."

He watched her cigarette drop aimlessly into the flames as she turned back to the fire. He tested her continually. He was happy that she had never lied to him, for he knew the answers to many of his questions before he asked them. There was, he supposed, nothing now that he did not know about her—except the innermost workings of her mind, and those he must discover before

the evening was over. Because she had always treated him with frankness, he would, later in the evening, place his own cards on the table, face upwards—a new experience for him, it is true, but this was an unusual evening. •

As they sat some time later at the table, with a hurricane lamp between them, he finished his soup and said:

“When I was very poor, Libby, I dreamed many dreams. Unless one can dream one never sees the sun and stays in the dark shadows with its cold and its poverty. In my early dreams,” he continued, “I saw wealth. I saw my wife the most beautiful woman in the world. I saw her riding in fine carriages, with fine jewels and fine servants. I saw our first child being born—the most beautiful child the world had ever seen.” He paused and looked across at her. “You, too, built your dreams, didn’t you, Libby, and had your disappointments?”

She did not answer. She had taken a piece of bread and between her fingers was thoughtfully making little balls of the soft dough.

“You see, if one achieves half one’s dreams one can call oneself successful. I have made money, which was my earliest ambition. But,” he said, as Bicroff returned to the room, “I have left many things by the wayside in the process.”

In the flickering light from the hurricane lamp, while Bicroff served cold chicken and a salad and placed the wine in an ice bucket at his side, he watched her across the table, still idly crumbling bread between her fingers.

“But I am a man without education,” he said, when they were again alone, “which has made me, I am afraid, a little shy when in the presence of cultured people, and

of cultured women especially. In material ways, I could buy those women all they desired and many of those women would have taken all I had to give. But to buy a cultured and lovely woman is not to own her. That is where many rich and self-made men are foolish, for those women, while taking all, would always look down on me and despise my lack of education and my social limitations. And so," he said, "I have always been ill-at-ease in the presence of people who are socially superior—a fault, I confess, of which I am a little ashamed. But the fact remains. Yet always I myself have looked for perfection in others. But then," he added, "perfection is elusive. That is why it is perfection—it is always outside one's reach. Each time one mounts a higher rung in the ladder, there is always a rung above."

He sat for a moment and then he said, "When I first saw my wife I thought that she was perfect. We have never spoken of her since she died, but tonight I would like to talk about her, if I may." He paused before saying, "She was serving behind a bar when I first saw her. I had a man with me with whom I wished to do business. I was selling children's toys at the time on commission—dolls whose eyes closed when you laid them down flat and toy cribs for them to lie in. Things like that. He was a buyer in an important chain store. I had toy rabbits to sell with ears that jumped up when you pressed a rubber bulb and a line of tin toys and children's books with coloured drawings. Gladys looked to me, that night, like a goddess. She had for me, then, all the glamour the world had ever seen. She wore a pearl necklace and two combs in her hair with real diamonds in them. Or so I thought. She had rings on her fingers that glistened in the lights of the bar and she

talked to the well-dressed customers around us as though she were an equal. No; she spoke down to them. That was another thing I noticed. I asked the man "I was hoping to do business with if he would like another drink, never thinking that he would, because I hadn't the money to buy another. But he asked for one." He laid down his knife and fork and reached for his slim gold case and took out a cigarette. "It was," he confessed thoughtfully, "a bad moment. I asked the man if he would go outside and buy me an evening newspaper while I ordered his drink and I explained my position to Gladys while he was outside and I offered her my Ingersoll watch as security for the drink, but she wouldn't take it. She would trust me, she said, and she put her own money into the till. I vowed, then and there, that I would make enough money to marry her, and I did."

Libby was watching him across the table, her face now cupped in her hands.

"I break no confidence," he continued in the same soft, precise voice. "The world now knows that she became a drunkard. I do not wish," he said, lighting his cigarette and inhaling, "to dwell upon that aspect of our marriage. But as my ambitions grew higher there was always my wife, disgracing me before important people."

"You lived together all those years . . . like that?"

"She had given me my start in life. I got an order from that man—an order that kept me in my job. I could hardly speak English at the time. Could I forget the debt I owed to her? She also bore me a child."

"And you so wanted—a son."

"As I have said, you cannot have everything in life. I wanted my daughter to be beautiful, but my beloved little Catherine is fat and ungainly. I do not blame her

for that. Perhaps I love her more because she, too, would like to be beautiful, and so we share the disappointment. Do not think I criticise my wife. Drink, to her, was an illness, an incurable disease. Would a man leave his wife because she had a cancer? Or suddenly grew blind? It is true," he said, wondering if he should say more or leave the subject, "that our married life was sometimes ugly. And I love beauty, I think, because I saw so little as a child. So I found beauty in other ways, surrounding myself with fine paintings, *objets d'art*, even flowers. I have flowers always in my office, as you have seen." Glancing across the table he added, "And I find flowers waiting for me here, made more beautiful for me because you arranged them."

Her eyes, for a moment, smiled. They were large eyes, brown like his own. But hers had no ageing lines around them, although tonight faint shadows lay beneath. They were lovely eyes, warm and expressive. He enjoyed watching them when they spoke together, but he had never seen them sad before. He decided to say no more about Gladys. He had only wanted to explain to her how it was that he had married so vulgar a woman, and to do so without too great a disloyalty.

Looking up, he said, "I shall always remember the first time I saw you in the village street here, Libby. You did not walk like the others in their blue jeans—slipshod and untidy. You walked like a thoroughbred. You must be, I thought, the daughter of someone of importance here. As I watched you from my automobile window I thought how proud I would have been had you been my daughter. You looked so young that day. I think some great happiness must have come to you that morning, for there seemed music in your smile as you passed and you were humming. I told Bicroff to

find out who you were. And then," he said, "I found you were living in a small house here with your child. You had no money. You were, in fact, in debt to the local stores. There seemed to be indecision here as to whether you were divorced or separated. So I decided to find out. But," he said, as he reached for the champagne, "you were not an easy person to locate. Illinois is a large State."

"Who told you I was from Illinois?"

He paused, the bottle poised, before refilling her glass and topping his own. "I think it was the postmaster here who told Bicroff," he said. "You had, you see, the qualities I admire in a woman. You were also," he added, as he put the bottle aside, "a woman I then knew I would never be afraid of—socially." It was better, he thought, to put every card on the table.

"Louis," she asked, twirling her wine glass by its slender stem, "when you had me invited to your party—the party you gave when you opened the house here—had you an idea then of offering me a job?"

"How could I do that until I knew if you were also intelligent? It is one thing to be beautiful to look at. But to remain beautiful, one must have intelligence or the picture loses its lustre and one tires of looking at it. You see, Libby," he said, leaning forward in his chair, "and this you must believe, I did not engage you as my housekeeper here because you were beautiful, although I do not, as you know, care for unattractive people near me. But you had the physical qualities I admire—the appearance, the grace, the charm. You had high intelligence and wit. You had also been trained as a stenographer, so that any letters I needed typing could be included in the service. But this I should also tell. You will remember perhaps our first talk together on

the patio here. I asked if you drank very much."

"I remember."

"You now know why I asked the question?"

"I understand why now . . . yes."

"You see, when we spoke together for the first time I was overjoyed to find you had a mind of your own. You did not praise this house like the other guests. You told me what you thought. That was a great pleasure to me. And after you left the party I found myself thinking of you far more than I should. That is when I decided to employ you, if I could. I think I was in love with you that evening before you left the party."

She was still twirling her wine glass by its stem. The whining of the wind outside had grown more gentle. He turned the lamp a little higher and watched the lights dance more brightly in her hair.

"And then, when you came up here on the evening that I telephoned, you delighted me still further."

"How, Louis?"

"You tried to chisel me over the wages I was to pay you."

Her eyes grew troubled.

"I was offering you," he said, "a fine wage. Three hundred dollars a month. You tried to trick me into three-fifty." He threw back his head and chuckled. "You could not have delighted me more. We were two people fighting for the sun, each in our own way. Many young women in this village would gladly have taken far less wages than I offered for so small a service. But not you." He spoke those last three words proudly, appraisingly.

"You were pretty tough that night, too," Libby said, again forcing a smile and reaching for a cigarette.

He lit her cigarette. "You could not have delighted me more," he repeated.

They sat for a moment listening to the fading echoes of the storm, the untidy rustling of the trees outside, the now intermittent pattering of rain. He studied her across the table. Throughout their association he had found growing pleasure in having her near him, watching the graceful way she moved, the slimness of her hips and the straightness of her limbs, the beauty of her arms and shoulders which glistened tonight like bronze. The Hattie Carnegie dress seemed to accentuate the curves of her. To him she had never looked so beautiful. He enjoyed the usual gaiety of her conversation, her graciousness to people, her easy charm when acting as hostess for him in New York. He enjoyed, too, the comments that certain of his associates had made about her when they dined at his apartment. Yes, she was a thoroughbred, and with a little more grooming would become his idea of ultimate perfection. But he did not wish the silences across the table to become too prolonged; and he did not wish the initiative to pass from his hands just yet. So he said:

"You mentioned just now, Libby, a disappointment in my life. Since you have mentioned it, I will speak of it. I never had a son." He brushed some fallen ash from the table with a well-manicured hand and looked across at her again. "There was a boy, once, that I wanted to adopt. He was a little fellow I met in Central Park one morning. Our acquaintance began when he came up to ask me the time. Then he walked with me for a little and, as children do, he began telling me about himself—how he had a sister, how they both lived with their uncle. And when I questioned him, he told me his parents were dead. His uncle, he told me, once had a fine job—driving a taxi. But he had had an accident and could drive no more. The thing that seemed to

delight little Robert was that his uncle now had an artificial leg which he took off at night. When I expressed suitable admiration for this feat, Robert, to impress me further, told me that his uncle took out his teeth as well." A slow reminiscent smile softened his expression as he said, "That, to little Robert, was magic. He was, you see," he continued, "the first child ever to take me into his confidence. If you have been lonely all your life, Libby, and a child comes to you as Robert did, it is flattering. He accepted me as I was—a middle-aged man taking a walk in Central Park each morning before going to his office. He did not know, when we met, that my car and chauffeur were waiting outside. And so, apart from telling me about his clever uncle, we talked of the birds and flowers as we walked. I gave him a small present when we parted—some small change from my pocket—and I did not expect to see him again. But next morning when he saw me coming he left his little companions and hurried over to me. Soon we were walking together every morning and I told him that I had ships that sailed the ocean and he liked to hear about those. Soon I had Harry Bicroff drive him to the docks when our ships came in and he liked especially to stand on the bridge and play that he was captain. He was a fine little fellow."

"Couldn't you have adopted him?" Libby asked, doodling thoughtfully with the tip of her cigarette amid the ash.

"How could I take that responsibility with a wife . . . unable to take care even of herself?"

The rain now seemed to have stopped, but water fell from the eaves, making plopping noises outside on the crazy paving.

"I will confess another thing to you," he said: "I do

not think I shall ever have—even a grandson.”

She lifted her eyes. “Why, Louis?”

This was a difficult matter to explain, but he intended tonight to bare his soul. And so he told her, as they sat in the unaccustomed light of the hurricane lamp, how Catherine had never attracted men. She was popular, she was a fine little athlete, she swam like a fish and sailed a boat beautifully, but no man had ever wanted to make love to her. He had watched, like a good father, the phases of her life through adolescence into young womanhood, and between them there had been no secrets. Catherine, before they left New York, had confided a secret of great intimacy: she was not interested in men, not interested at all. Catherine, it appeared, was now attracted only by her own sex.

“To you, Libby,” he said, “she is devoted.”

He asked her to explain Catherine’s problem in more detail, which Libby did, gently and with understanding. He listened attentively, chain-smoking. That this phase in Catherine’s emotional life would very likely pass, as Libby explained, was not wholly reassuring. That there should ever be such a phase in a woman’s life he found difficult to understand, for in his orderly mind there was man and there was women. There was nothing else. In any case, a situation that he himself could not change by argument or force was one beyond his comprehension. As he watched the pile of ash grow in front of him, he wondered if he had been wise to raise this subject. But tonight he wanted to speak of intimate things, and he felt that being able to speak together on so delicate a matter had already drawn them into a closer bond. To no other woman, in any case, could he have confided this unhappy phase in his daughter’s life.

“Maybe it’s even a defence against herself,” he heard

Libby saying in final explanation. "She's sensitive and feels that no man will ever marry her. Yet if a boy pays her attention, she shrinks away, feeling that it's her father's money he's after. She's a curious, mixed-up little person at the moment and I think you're wise to let her go to Paris. If she lives on the Left Bank she'll mix with all types, and that's what she's needing." She paused. "Don't think I'm being presumptuous, Louis, but I'd give her a fixed allowance and make her live on it. I'd forget your usual generosity for a little while and make the allowance small. You've made it difficult for the child to have any sense of values by giving her everything she's ever asked for. I think standing on her own two feet, especially at this moment, is the best thing that could happen. Living abroad, too, and having to speak a different language is excellent. It'll keep her busy and stop her being introspective. But don't think I criticise her. She's one of the nicest kids I ever met." She paused, then said, "Now I'd like to talk about myself."

He shifted his position in the chair. Thoughtfully, he said, "Confession, Libby, as I have found unexpectedly tonight, is a selfish pleasure. You, on your side, have certain things that you would like to tell to me, too. But I do not think there is anything in your life that I do not know, and when I say *anything* that is precisely what I mean." Their eyes met and for a moment she held his glance. "But it is important, I think, that we remember that everything in life is comparative. Things happen in a small community like this which would pass unnoticed in a big city. Everything in life, you see, is comparative. The husband of the lady who writes anonymous letters will shortly be arraigned for dishonesty over war-time contracts, although he is not yet aware of it. Which, then, is the greater sin—love, which

every beautiful woman must experience, or real dishonesty, which is punishable by law?"

She glanced across the table, frowning. "Will he *really* be prosecuted?"

He shrugged. "He will be lucky, I understand, if he avoids a jail sentence. But do not let us waste time talking of him. I mention him only to stress a sense of values. On the one side there is avarice and greed, falsification of books so that a man can rob his country in the middle of a war—and there is yourself, who wore the uniform of her country, who on a small income has paid her tax loyally, but is now persecuted because, being beautiful, she had intimate temptations that women who are not beautiful do not encounter. If one thinks for a moment of things like that, one begins to sort problems into their rightful levels. I have done many things, Libby, which I prefer to forget, for few men who build fortunes can look back upon their business dealings and feel proud of certain of the things they did while building them. So, again, if we think of things like that we begin to see how unimportant are the things you would like to tell me. Unimportant, that is, compared to the things that I have done or the things that Mr. Fields has done. So I see no reason for them to be discussed. Let me, instead, thank you for your suggestion that I buy a radio station and employ Mr. Sands to be its chief executive. I have already discussed the matter with a business colleague and we think it should prove a profitable investment. The station we have in mind to buy," he said, watching her carefully, "is a long way from here. It is also a long way from New York. But I think Mr. Sands will be interested in the proposition. I also think his wife—to whom you will know he is now happily reconciled—will be interested,

too. The climate, in addition, should prove admirable for their children. It is a satisfactory solution." He watched her stub her cigarette slowly and deliberately into the ash-tray.

This was the moment, he felt, when different tactics should be employed. He had spent long enough on sentiment, and speaking in a sentimental vein was difficult for him, in any case. He was more at ease in the large chair at the head of his board-room table, firing questions at his subordinates.

"Have you thought about Melissa's future?" he asked, brusquely.

"Of course."

"You have recently, I understand, taken out an insurance policy for her education. If you cease to be employed, can you maintain the premiums?"

"I'll have to find another job."

"To put her through college needs money. You could not earn enough in Drakefall Point to do that. There is no work. Your only business training is as a secretary. It is as well, tonight, that we discuss that aspect of the situation. You have ideas for her socially, as well?"

"What mother hasn't?"

"Then is it not wise to remember for a moment that she has no father?"

Her eyes narrowed as she looked across at him.

"Was it necessary to remind me of that?"

"If you are considering her future socially—very," he said. "You see, it had been my intention to adopt her legally, if we married. That would ensure that she had a name and a settled future. She could then leave the village school here and start a new life with us in the East, as Melissa Marcalis. She would, of course, be treated as a daughter, equally with Catherine. I tell you

these things so that there shall be no misunderstanding."

"Are you trying to *buy* me?" Libby asked. Her voice, for a moment, was cold, almost contemptuous: but she softened and laid a hand upon his. "Louis, don't ever think I'm not grateful for all you've done for me. I came here tonight to try to tell you how grateful I am. Your letter touched and flattered me—deeply. How deeply you will never know. It would be so easy to say yes to you. If I were thoroughly dishonest it would be the solution to so many problems. But I couldn't treat you that way."

He could hear a clock ticking. A log shifted in the grate beside them and the fire subsided into a jumble of charred wood. The light from the hurricane lamp seemed harsh, suddenly, and cold.

"You see," he heard her saying, "Melissa and I have always managed. We always shall. We've always had enough to eat. Obviously I'd like her to have the opportunities that I never had, but that's the feeling of any mother. But what I've thought about all the time since I had your letter is—ourselves. You can't turn love on and off like a faucet, Louis. Nor can you make yourself fall in love. I loved Hilton till it hurt. It hurts me still. I shall always love him—the memory, anyway. It's better that I'm honest, isn't it?"

"Yes," he agreed, quietly, "it is better that you are honest."

"You spoke just now of buying a woman, yet never owning her. That, in its way, explains so much of what I want to say. And yet—and how curious this is—it's my respect for you that makes everything impossible, flattered as I am. I could only give you a second-best, Louis, taking everything with both hands and giving you in return only—gratitude." She lifted her eyes and

looked into his. "That's how it is, Louis," she said, quietly, "and I wish I didn't have to hurt you."

There was another argument. "I am fifty-five," he said. "You are, I think, thirty-three. That is, in some ways, a large difference in age. In other ways, age has no meaning. Since you have worked for me we have grown to know each other. We have talked of many things and spent many hours together. We have enjoyed each other's company and found many things to delight us—music, the books we have read, and we found delight, too, in the exchange of ideas about them. We did not then think of age, did we?"

"No. . . ."

"We were good companions?"

"Very."

"Then it should not be difficult for us to continue that side of our relationship. You and I also have a bond in common—neither of us has found the happiness in life we sought. That is why I thought, together, we might try to find what happiness we could. I have worked hard all my life, but it is now my intention to take life easier, and travel. You mentioned the Bahamas, once, do you remember? To winter in the Bahamas, you once told me in New York after hearing some of my friends speak of their vacation there, would be your idea of heaven. Do you remember?"

"I do."

He would now play his trump card. "It is," he said, "my intention to winter in the Bahamas. I have already rented a house there. So when you consider my letter, remember the alternative of spending the long winter here in Drakefall Point—or in the Bahamas, as my wife."

She put her glass aside, a little wearily, but there was

kindness, he noticed, in her eyes and great sincerity. "Louis," she said, "dear Louis, you refuse to understand. I've tried to tell you in the kindest way I can that I'm not in love with you. It's hard to tell a man that—a man I respect as much as I do you, a man I owe so much to. When I'm overdrawn again at the bank I shall always remember that a millionaire once asked me to marry him. But I shall be able to look back with greater pride, knowing that I liked him too well to accept. You see, Louis, as you once said to me, gratitude is not enough. Obviously there's more than gratitude—there's affection. But, again, that's not enough. Not in marriage. So let me be grateful for all you've done for me, and proud that you asked me. Let's finish everything on that note. I'll be all right. Don't worry about me. In any case, I've more money in the bank than I ever had. So don't worry about me, Louis. Don't worry about my living in Drakefall Point. I was happy here before. I'll move on somewhere else when Melissa has to go to high school. Perhaps I'll move into the city then, and take a job. There must be plenty of jobs in San Francisco."

She was doodling again amid the ash. He reached for his glass and took a sip of wine, for his mouth was too dry to speak. He sipped again from his glass and replaced it on to the table.

"You have been very frank," he said, as casually as he was able. "Let us talk, then, of other matters." Almost nonchalantly, and shifting his position again in his chair, he spoke of Judge Prout. He had, he said, given consideration to her view that the Judge had been treated harshly. Perhaps, he said, when he had made his peace by inviting the Judge to become a trustee for the house that he would be handing over to the village, that

he might prevail upon him to become again a member of his board. He paid gracious tribute to the manner in which his house had been run, and he asked that the garden be properly maintained until the house was handed over. He mentioned that he had already glanced through the household accounts and that everything appeared to be in order; and he mentioned that Miss Kennedy would deal from New York with any matters that might still be outstanding. As there seemed nothing more to say, and no use in prolonging the evening further, he rose to his feet.

Bicroff entered, and seeing the condition of the fire he hurried towards it, getting down on to his knees: but Marcalis told him brusquely to repack the luggage, for he was returning to the city. A fire would not be needed.

Marcalis was already behind Libby's chair. They walked into the hall and he helped her into her shabby nutria coat before opening the front door. The storm, having blown itself out, had left the sky cloudless, and the stars, rain-washed, shone with a new brilliance. Water still dripped from the trees as they stood with the smell of wet earth around them, neither of them seeming to find words to say. She would walk home, she said, at last.

He looked down at her satin shoes. She could not walk home in those, he said: Bicroff must drive her. But she insisted upon walking. Then she must borrow his rubber over-shoes, he said, and he called to Bicroff, who came hurrying. He was grateful for this interlude when there was forced laughter as Bicroff, like a shoe salesman, knelt on the floor and helped her into the over-shoes. There had always been a joke between them about their wearing the same size of shoe, he having the smallest feet of any man she had known. But this forced interlude

of gaiety passed and Bicroff returned to the kitchen. He would walk with her as far as the gate, Marcalis said.

They walked down the drive together in silence. As he trod the wet gravel in his slippers he wondered, gropingly, if there were further arguments that he could use. He had, on the plane flying west, planned meticulously each detail of their wedding, which would take place while he was on this visit to the Coast--the pearls that he would place around her neck in the quiet of their suite at the Fairmont Hotel, and the other jewels that he had chosen with such care. And later in the quiet of their suite their marriage would be consummated and she would belong to him. . . . Had he approached Libby wrongly? Had he throughout their association been too old-fashioned in his method of approach. He knew so little of women. Yet how can a man approach the woman he wishes to marry other than with respect? As he walked beside her, his feet growing damp, he wondered, almost in desperation, if he had been wrong to offer marriage with its binding ties. Maybe he should have suggested that she become his mistress, with a luxury apartment and the semi-freedom that a mistress can enjoy. She would then have surrendered to him dutifully, like any other mistress. Now each step that he took, with the damp seeping still more through the thin soles of his slippers, was a step nearer to the end of their association. . . . He walked beside her not knowing, for the first time in his life, what to do. Never again could he suggest that she fly to New York on the pretext that she act as chaperone for Catherine or have her fly East on the flimsy pretext of having her advise on the redecoration of his apartment. It would be the end of their evenings together in San Francisco when he made a pretext of asking her to drive into the city to take down

some private letters, and then decided to dictate them the following morning so that they could dine together and he could look at her across the table. It would be the end of the days in Drakefall Point when Libby was constantly up at the house as he found further things for her to do, and he watched her every movement with delight. Now, even those days were ended. . . . Her time he had owned, buying it. Her thoughts, for a little while, he had shared. The thrill of finally possessing her was slipping through his fingers!

They reached the gate. The damp had now seeped right into his slippers and he was shivering. A car passed by, first blinding them with its headlights, then splashing them with mud. They stood side by side in the darkness, the rustle of wet leaves around them, watching the tail-lights of the car disappear down the hill in the direction of the village.

He broke the silence by saying, "You talked tonight, Libby, of gratitude . . . but that is something belonging to the past." He had a longing to touch her before she left him and, timidly, he held her arm. His mind was too confused to think calmly. He said, "Should you ever think again of what I have said tonight—and without reason you still feel obligated to me—will you also think of this, Libby . . . you could give me . . . a son."

She placed a hand for a moment over his. Then, with a whispered goodnight, she left him. He stood listening to the soft pad of her footsteps until there was no longer any sound.

A short time later, with a change of shoes and dry socks, he sat in the back seat of his car and watched the bright headlights pick up the now familiar landmarks of the village. He turned to look back through the rear

window as they climbed the hill. Drakefall Point was still shrouded in darkness, but here and there dim lights shone among the hillside as oil lamps lighted its people to bed. As they topped the hill, a village that he would never see again disappeared from view: but he continued to look through the rear window as the black shiny road unwound behind him like a satin ribbon. Later, he turned away and reached into his pocket for his slim gold case. After driving a few miles further he leaned forward and asked Bicroff to drive faster.

Bicroff accelerated obediently. The little guy in the back seat was the toughest egg he'd ever worked for, and he'd worked for a few tough ones in his time. He demanded a lot and was hard to know, but he paid well. What's more, if you behaved yourself you had a job for life. The trouble was, working for him, you never knew where you'd be sleeping from night to night. As Bicroff drove along the winding road through the redwoods he began thinking of the way the boss had just asked him to drive faster. When he gave an order he never said please, though he sometimes said thank you. But, when asking him to drive faster just now, he said please. Funny, he thought, that a little thing like that could leave an impression. He'd never heard him say please in all the years he'd worked for him. He shifted his head at moments so that he could see him reflected in the mirror. He often wondered what the little guy thought about when he sat there saying nothing, chain-smoking. "A better trip, this way, boss," he called cheerfully over his shoulder, "than it was coming out." There was no reply.

An hour later the shiny Cadillac drew up outside the Fairmont Hotel. Marcalis left the car without a word

and the commissionaire hastily summoned staff to remove the luggage. Bicroff returned to the hotel after parking the car, but one of the night clerks on duty at the desk told him that Mr. Marcalis had retired for the night and did not wish to be disturbed.

The little guy's slipping, he thought, as he walked out of the hotel to find lodgings for the night. Forgot to give me the orders for the morning. Never done that in all the years I've worked for him. He'll also have to do his own unpacking, and a mess he always makes of that. He walked down California Street, deciding, late though the hour was, to find a bar and some congenial company. The trouble about working for Marcalis was that it sometimes got lonely. But he was lucky to finish the night in the city instead of up at Drakefall Point with only a coloured dame for company.

He walked into the first bar that he came to and sat on a high stool and gave his order. It had been a long day. He could never sleep properly on a plane and he seemed to have done a lot of travelling in the last twenty-four hours. He sipped his first drink, listening vaguely to the music from the juke box behind him, his elbows on the counter, thinking again of the way the boss had said please. Made the little guy sound humble. But he smiled as another thought came to him—I bet he'll bawl the hell out of me in the morning for not knowing the orders!

"You seem happy," the bartender said, giving Bicroff his change. "A good day playing the horses?"

"No," Harry Bicroff replied. "This ugly mug of mine was only smiling because I've a good job. When a guy's happy in his job, I guess he's something to be happy about."

"I guess you're right," the bartender agreed.

But, Harry Bicroff thought as he sipped his second drink, the little guy is going to be lost without Miss Catherine when she goes to live in Paris, France. He'd heard them talking together about it on the back seat when he drove them from the airport. He never thought the little guy would agree to a proposition like that, for the bottom seemed to drop out of his world when she wasn't around. But there was nothing the little guy wouldn't do for Miss Catherine. No wonder, though, he seemed kinda depressed this evening.

Harry Bicroff left the bar after three drinks and some congenial conversation, and walked out into the emptying streets. Yes, he loved the little guy he worked for. He wouldn't put in all the hours he did, if he didn't. Not many men give a job to a man straight out of jail, like Marcalis had done for him fifteen years ago. Took him on trust, on his brother's recommendation. And who was his brother? Only a taxi driver in New York who'd lost a leg and now had a job in the Marcalis office as a janitor. The boss was even paying for the education of the young nephew his brother adopted when their other brother died. And now the boss said please to him—like *he* was grateful! He stopped to light a cigarette. It was certainly a cock-eyed world.

He continued his way down the hill towards the lights of Market Street to the shabby hotel at which he usually stayed, whistling as he walked. Another thing made him happy tonight: from what he'd overheard while he was setting up the table for dinner, the little guy was giving up his house at Drakefall Point. Harry Bicroff had never liked that place. It was too quiet up there for his liking, and *nothing* ever happened.

XIX

TOM ALLBRIGHT OPENED HIS STORE a week after the last summer visitor had departed, and stood at the door inhaling the morning air and surveying the quiet of the village street. Al Reindeck was already at work across the way on the Judge's car, giving it a wax and a polish, for the Judge, so he heard, had important business to do that afternoon in San Francisco. The Judge had stopped in the night before for a bottle of his favourite Kentucky whisky, something he hadn't bought for himself these last few months, and he seemed more cheerful. A pity, Tom thought, that he gave up being judge. Judge Halliday was too lenient, especially with the hot-rods who speeded through the village.

Tom saw Clem Walters, the new postmaster, arrive and they exchanged a word or two about the weather. According to Professor Carmichael, Clem Walters said, the storm last week had been the heaviest that Drakefall Point had experienced in fifteen years. That is, for this time of year. Agreeing that it looked like being another hot day, Clem unlocked the Post Office and went inside. Clem sorts the mail quicker than Mark Featherbow did, Tom Allbright thought, as he saw Jack Taylor's car coming down the hill, but the village don't seem the same without Mark.

Jack Taylor drew up at the store to collect his morning newspaper and Tom took the opportunity of suggesting that Dorothy—who organised most of the village functions—should start the whist drives a little earlier this winter, for most of the prizes were bought at his store. Jack, scanning the headlines, paid scant attention; but

he promised to put the suggestion to his wife. He then, with a wave, drove off in the direction of his office in High Valley. Jack's hitting the bottle again, Tom thought, having noticed the puffiness around his eyes. He usually does start drinking as soon as the summer visitors leave.

Dr. Braithwaite drove by. Earl was, Tom supposed, on his way to the Judge's house to see Maud Prout. One thing about Drakefall Point—they had a good doctor. He had certainly saved Maud Prout's life, with the wonderful operation he did. According to what he heard yesterday, Earl was going to take care of Mrs. Hilton Sands, who had started another baby. A compliment to him, that, she living down the Peninsula. He supposed she'd come up here for her check-up every month, and Earl would do the delivery, when the time came, in San Francisco.

Ben Truman's truck lumbered past. Tom guessed that Ben was on his way to the Professor's house to see about a leak in his kitchen roof. There was little that he, the storekeeper, did not know about the day-to-day life of the community.

Joe Murphy came chugging over the hill in his old jalopy, and drew up to collect his newspaper. He had received a letter, Joe said, from Marcalis's secretary in New York to say that he wanted to sell his cabin cruiser and his speed boat. "He never set foot in either of them this summer," Joe added. "And who is there up here who can afford to buy that cabin cruiser? There's no finer boat this side of San Rafael."

"Take my advice, Joe, and don't hurry about selling either of them. He's got plenty of dough, that guy. So long as you don't sell them, you'll still get the mooring rents."

Joe pushed back his old baseball cap and scratched his head. "He always treated me regular," he said. "BUILT me a new wharf, too. He always treated me generous."

Tom Allbright grinned. "We're in business to make money, ain't we, Joe? If there are suckers in the world, that's *their* affair. If I didn't take care of *myself*, I'd have a column of bad debts as long as your arm. So if I find a sucker, I use him. Charge him plenty, Joe. He won't miss it."

The wizened face of the old boatman looked up from his battered Ford. "Tom," he said, in his high-pitched but bronchial voice, "you stick out in this community like a sore thumb. I should have thought you'd have been around here long enough to learn good-neighbourliness. But it seems that some folks can't. You've had it your own way for a long time now; but if Luke Fields, as I hear, is thinking of starting a chain of grocery stores in Marin County and builds the first one here, you'll have to change your ways a bit. Folks are already finding it's cheaper to do their marketing over at Inverness or Point Reyes Station. I may not be what you call smart, Tom, but I prefer to treat folks fair, like other folks in this community. And after all," he added, replacing the sun-bleached baseball cap back on his head, "you can't take it with you, can you?" He put his car into gear and began chugging his way along the sea road towards his wharf.

Tom Allbright watched him go. ~~So~~ that son-of-a-bitch Luke, was thinking of financing a chain of grocery stores, was he? He had intended to bowl the hell out of Luke for putting some broken bottles in his empties again and expecting credit for them: but if Luke was going to become important in the grocery world it might pay to say nothing about it. Just yet, anyway. Worried,

he walked back into the store, deciding to say nothing to Rosie about what Joe had just told him, for Rosie worried worse than he did when there was anything to worry about and then got her figuring muddled and sometimes gave wrong change. So he stood looking out through the store window, keeping the rumour to himself but calculating what it might mean to him. He didn't like what Joe had said about him personally, either.

Presently Tom saw Kurt Grunther enter the Post Office to be first in line. Kurt never missed being first in line. Business had fallen off in his saloon since the time Florino got drunk there and Tom Allbright now refused him credit, for he wasn't in business to be kept waiting for his money. When the first customers arrived in the store he let Rosie serve them. This rumour of Joe's still occupied his mind.

Tom saw Ada Kingston's old Cadillac drive up before the Post Office, Emily Prout seated primly beside its owner. You could set your watch by the time of their arrival each morning. At their entrance his wife always left other customers and gave them her personal attention: and Tom always adopted his most obsequious manner when he escorted them to the door. But this morning Rosie was selling some curtain material to Ethel Rosali at the other side of the store, for Ethel was having her living-room done over, and she had not noticed their arrival. So Tom went over to attend to them.

Emily's toothsome smile was growing more rabbit-like every day, Tom thought, as he assured her how well she was looking. No, she said, she was feeling far from well. She would never rent her house again, either, and visit relations: they were all growing too old and too deaf. "And besides," she said, "when I think I rented

the house to that Hilton Sands—with all that went on there while I was away. . . .”

“Fiddlesticks!” Ada Kingston interrupted— as she examined the vegetable counter, “He was a very charming young man.”

“Speaking as you find people, Miss Kingston,” Tom Allbright said, “Mr. Sands seemed a nice gentleman—to me. But, of course,” he added, turning tactfully to Emily, “you can only speak of folk as you find them, Miss Prout, and he was a good customer here and settled his accounts prompt.” He then assured Miss Kingston that he had better tomatoes than those for his favoured customers and went into the back of the store.

When he returned, with some tomatoes at a higher price, Nancy Battersbury and Brenda Ford were talking excitedly at the meat counter. Having bowed his two most important customers from the store, Tom walked a little disdainfully towards the meat counter, for all *those* two ever ordered was ground meat. But from the way Brenda threw her weight about you’d think she was ordering T-bone steaks.

As he reached the meat counter he heard that Libby had left the village. She just couldn’t take the ridicule, Brenda was saying. So she had packed up two nights ago and decamped, taking Melissa with her in her red convertible. “She didn’t even settle her gasoline account with Al Reindeck!” she said. “And, God knows, Al’s been a good friend to her. Did she settle *your* account, Tom?”

“Who are you referring to?” Tom asked, playing safe.

“Libby. She’s closed up the house and walked out! Can you tie it? The only person she troubled to leave a note for was Dorothy Taylor. And think of all *we’ve* done for her! Didn’t Nancy here take care of Melissa night

after night till she got sick and tired of it? She hasn't even left any rent behind! Just decamped!"

Nancy Battersbury had an elbow on the counter and was flicking ash over her shoulder.

"Thought she could high-hat us when she was taken up by Louis Marcalis. Well, pride always has a fall," she said, "and don't ask me to be sorry for her."

Brenda Ford's strident voice had penetrated the store and many heads were turned. Ethel Rosali, whose neatly-typed column for the *Gazette* was already in the mail, asked Rosie Allbright to wait a minute while she went across to the meat counter. If there was an extra paragraph to add to her column she could always telephone it through.

"What's this I hear?" Ethel asked. "Libby's left Drakefall Point? It's impossible! Why, I only saw her two days ago and she said nothing to *me* about it."

Brenda leaned against the counter, her hands deep in the pockets of her tight and faded jeans, a group collecting around them. "If you were going to decamp, Mrs. Rosali, would *you* tell everyone in advance?" She glanced over her shoulder at the scales as Tom put on lumps of ground meat, took bits off, then added more when he saw that she was watching. "No," she said, turning back to Ethel Rosali, "Libby's too smart for that. She just packed up her few possessions and cleared out. Not that she had very much to pack," she added, sniffing.

"I don't believe it!" Ethel said, her anger rising. "Libby wouldn't do a thing like that—which is more," she added, glaring up at Brenda, "than I can say for *some* people who've come into this town in recent years! No one's going to tell me that Libby left without paying her bills, because I won't believe it!"

Brenda smirked. "Believe what you like," she said,

"but she hasn't settled her bills, and, besides, people don't leave a place in the middle of the night, do they, if they've anything to be proud about?" She then swaggered out of the store with Nancy Battersbury, each carrying a pound of ground meat wrapped in white paper.

In the village street, outside, a crowd had collected as the news spread. Some shook their heads; some looked dumbfounded. Tom Allbright, not knowing what to think, looked worried. He had been allowing Libby credit.

XX

ADA KINGSTON SAT IN HER DRAWING-ROOM before lunch with Emily Prout and the Judge. The letter that Libby had written to her from San Francisco, and which had been handed to her at the Post Office an hour before, had been passed around for each of them to read. The Judge, reading it last, returned it to Ada Kingston.

"I have always thought," Ada said, placing the letter back into its envelope, "that Mrs. Carson was a young woman of quality. I've said so to you many times Emily. Homer, I think, has always agreed with me. But this letter, I think, proves it. Her suggestion that the furniture she's left behind be given to the Red Cross is one of public spirit, and her choice of Dorothy Taylor to take care of her affairs a wise one. Her letter is also generous, well-worded—and very sensibly put." She took off her pince-nez and allowed them on their satin ribbon to fall on to her ample bosom. "But where, Homer," she asked, turning to the Judge, "exactly are the Bahamas?"

